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Settler Colonialism as a Structure?

Reflections on Settler Colonial Discourse



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Settler Colonialism as a Structure?
Reflections on Settler Colonial Discourse

Introduction

Jeremia Pelgrom & Clemens Six

Ever since the publication of Patrick Wolfe's seminal paper on settler colonialism's logic of elimination, historians have debated with new vigour what settler colonialism is, when and why it originally emerged, and how it has shaped the world we live in today. Among other things, this growing historical interest resulted in the evolution of a distinct research field on settler colonialism with its own specialised journal and numerous publications on a wide range of case studies across different time periods and geographical regions. Arguably, the most striking characteristic of this emerging field is its structural approach, which recognises settlers as a distinct analytical category that operates according to agendas different from those of colonial powers based in the metropole. This approach not only serves to distinguish various colonial modes of operation, but its structural perspective also holds the potential to reveal the underlying forces and patterns driving settler colonial expansion. On the other hand, critics have pointed out the limitations of this approach, particularly its emphasis on colonial agents, which tends to overlook indigenous agency and empowerment in these processes. The suggestion of a single, unifying logic driving this phenomenon across various historical and geographical contexts has also been challenged, along with the rigid distinction between settler and exploitative colonial modes.

This publication emerges from a workshop held at the Royal Netherlands Institute (KNIR) in Rome in June 2024 organized in the contexts of the *Settler Colonial Paradigms* research program. It brings together a group of scholars from the Research Centre for Historical Studies at University of Groningen, who, as relative outsiders to the field, were invited to engage with this topical discourse from their own disciplinary perspectives. They present historiographical reflections on whether settler colonialism can be understood as a structure and how such an interpretation might enrich our historical understanding by offering a long-term perspective. The contributors cover a wide range of cases from the roots of settler colonialism in the ancient Mediterranean world to contemporary utopias about settling on Mars. The common goal of these contributions is to raise new questions and potentially examine case studies that specialists in the field have either overlooked or analysed from different angles. More specifically, they ask whether a structural approach does indeed allow us to identify core elements that characterised settler colonialism through the ages and across continents; what

How to cite: J. Pelgrom and C. Six, 'Introduction', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Pelgrom-Six

distinguishes settler colonialism from other manifestations of colonialism; what the role of (access to) land was; which other socio-economic, cultural, and political-ideological factors can possibly explain settler colonialism; and what the relevance of this concept is to analyse and understand contemporary international and local relations around the globe?

In keeping with the dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of the discourse, these contributions are presented as reflections rather than fully polished academic papers. They feature light referencing and make no claim to exhaustive bibliographies or complete mastery of the topic. Instead, they represent responses from informed outsiders to the discourse, intended to spark further discussion by introducing fresh perspectives and expertise. The result is a mosaic of concise case studies that highlight two key points: settler colonialism is a complex, multi-layered concept that fuels thought-provoking debates on political, socio-economic, and cultural displacement throughout history; and the need for a comparative, global, and long-term analysis to precisely identify the structural elements driving this phenomenon and determine its potential connection to Modernity.

The Ancient Roots of Settler Colonialism

Jeremia Pelgrom

The discourse on settler colonialism has largely been shaped by historians of the modern era, with a strong emphasis on Western colonial practices. While this perspective has provided valuable insights into the phenomenon's influence on the modern geopolitical order, its narrow scope limits a more comprehensive understanding of settler colonialism as a broader historical process (exceptions include Kiernan 2007; Cavanagh and Veracini 2017). This is particularly evident in the field's efforts to uncover the deeper underlying factors driving the so-called "logic of elimination" of indigenous populations within settler colonialism (Wolfe 2006). Prominent scholars have connected the emergence of this destructive structure to defining elements of Modernity, such as capitalism, class struggle, nationalism, and Enlightenment philosophy—thereby suggesting that it is a product of a specific historical context (e.g. Wolfe 2006; Mamdani 2020).

To an ancient historian, the emphasis on (early) modern European history is unsatisfying, as many aspects of modern settler colonialism strongly align with phenomena familiar to the ancient world. This suggests that the quest to unravel the roots of this structure cannot be limited to an analysis of Western colonialism in the modern era; instead, it must embrace a global historical approach and, more importantly for this essay, a long-term perspective (Levine and Marriott 2012). A deep historical approach would not only offer more examples and contexts to examine but also provide a stronger foundation for addressing one of the key underlying questions in this field: whether all human migrations into new territories inherently have the potential to lead to eliminatory projects, or whether such outcomes arise only under specific colonial configurations, societal conditions, or ideological contexts.

The ancient world, in particular, offers a valuable lens for exploring this question, given the diverse colonial forms it produced, only some of which appear to have resulted in systematic eliminatory policies. This diversity presents a unique opportunity to investigate the specific factors that drive such destructive colonial logics. While there is extensive scholarship on colonization and its effects on indigenous societies in antiquity, a comprehensive structural analysis of the dynamics behind colonial elimination practices—and why they are particularly prominent in some cases but less so in others—remains largely absent. Notably, one of the few direct attempts to tackle this issue dates back to the early 16th century, offering some intriguing ideas that merit further exploration. In his Discourses on Livy, Macchiavelli examines the question why people leave their homelands and invade the

How to cite: J. Pelgrom, 'The Ancient Roots of Settler Colonialism', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Pelgrom

territories of others (Macchiavelli 1531, 2.8). Within this discussion, he also proposes an intriguing theory about why certain forms of expansion lead to mass-elimination while others do not. In his analysis, he compares the Gallic invasion of Italy with Roman imperial expansion, contending that they led to significantly different levels of violence and displacement, with the Gallic model clearly representing the most extreme case.

Machiavelli's theory on the logic of elimination

Machiavelli's primary insight is that the logic of indigenous population elimination is fundamentally influenced by the differing motivations behind territorial invasions. According to his analysis, *ambition* leads to expansion without a logic of elimination, while *necessity* results in the mass displacement and elimination of populations. The reason for this difference, in his view, is that ambition is fulfilled when the conquered people acknowledge their subordinate status and submit to the will of the new power, whereas expansion driven by necessity only achieves its goal if the native population is removed from the targeted land. While this differentiation somewhat corresponds with the modern scholarly convention of distinguishing between exploitative colonialism and settler colonialism (Veracini 2011 and Osterhammel 2002 for a more refined typology), there is an important difference. Macchiavelli, with his example, seems to suggest that expansion in imperial contexts, like the Roman Empire are exclusively driven by ambition, while necessity motivated expansion, such as the Gallic invasions, operated outside an official institutional context.

Furthermore, Machiavelli not only proposes that factors such as poverty and demographic pressure trigger this destructive force, but also highlights relative differences in living conditions. He suggests that the warm and abundant Mediterranean lands serve as constant pull factors. Analogous to an inverted thermodynamic law, people are naturally drawn to warmer and presumably more comfortable living conditions. According to this perspective, the structure of settler colonization is thus also shaped by inequalities in the expected standard of living. Lastly, Machiavelli underscores the significance of scale: the structure of elimination can only be activated if a sufficient number of people migrate collectively. Intriguingly, he suggests that migrating communities that lack the power to replace indigenous populations adopt cooperation strategies, but nonetheless are inherently part of the replacement structure, remaining dormant until circumstances allow them to act.

Are Mass-migrations a Form of Settler Colonialism?

While Machiavelli's theory is certainly intriguing, it has clear shortcomings, particularly due to its evident bias in evaluating Roman imperialism. His suggestion of less violent Roman invasion strategies

is not supported by literary sources, including Livy, who frequently documents Roman colonial elimination campaigns (cf. below). However, his analysis of mass-migration movements, such as those of the Gauls, raises an intriguing question: can these phenomena be considered examples of settler colonialism? Answering this question meaningfully would require formal criteria for defining settler colonialism—an issue not yet fully addressed in current scholarship. Most modern studies either overlook this form of settlement invasion or distinguish it from colonization, arguing that it does not leave behind a controlling center of expansion or does not create separate political units in the case of frontier expansion (Osterhammel, 2002, 4-10). However, if the aim is to understand the dynamics that lead to elimination practices in resettlement contexts, examining these mass-migration cases may still prove valuable.

While the details of ancient mass-migrations remain unclear, recent studies suggest they were more replacive than previously thought. Traditional scholarship assumed these migrations led to hybrid cultures by blending migrating peoples, often considered minorities, with indigenous populations. However, genetic research is challenging this view. Ancient DNA analyses reveal significant shifts in genetic makeup, showing that existing populations and cultures were absorbed far less than once believed. The early Bronze Age Yamnaya culture, for instance, replaced languages, cultures, and genetic populations in Europe, with only a small portion of the original population surviving, probably through the incorporation of local women (Haak et al. 2015; Furholt 2018; for critical views Klejn 2017; Balanovsky 2017). Similar patterns are seen in later migrations into the Mediterranean, though the extent of replacement and its mechanisms remain debated. Despite fragmented and contested evidence, a growing consensus suggests these migrations were more replacive than once thought, aligning with elements of the settler colonial logic of elimination paradigm.

Arguably, the most important difference between these early examples of mass-migration and modern settler colonial case-studies is not so much the extent of elimination, but the institutional context. While modern settler colonialism occurred within an imperial framework, leveraging an asymmetrical power system armoured by legal, ideological and military instruments, these early examples occurred in more anarchic conditions. Especially Wolfe, emphasizes the importance of this imperial context and juridical and ideological tool-kit for settler colonial structure (Wolfe 2006). While we should not overemphasize the importance of these institutional-imperial instruments in modern settler colonialism, as much of this happened in rather anarchic conditions too, this is an important difference. In any case, it seems reasonable to distinguish between these two scenarios of replacive settler migration. Perhaps we can use the term *Settler Colonization* as a more general term that encompasses both phenomena, while *Settler Colonialism* refers only to the latter variant, as the term colonialism entails a system of domination accompanied by an ideology and legal system of control.



If it is plausible that *Settler Colonization* is a very ancient phenomenon that certainly predates Modernity, the two logical follow-up questions are whether *Settler Colonialism* is an ancient phenomenon too, and, arguably more importantly, what factors have triggered the development of such practice and its associated logic of elimination. Again, here the problem of establishing the precise criteria for what thresholds define settler colonialism, complicates any analysis. However, while such a formal approach is currently out of reach, it is possible to highlight some striking parallels between aspects of settler colonialism structure distinguished in modern colonialism and practices and mentalities recorded for the ancient world.

Settler colonial logic of elimination in Antiquity

Ancient sources often recount instances of settler communities attempting to completely annihilate indigenous populations (Dougherty 1993, 31–44). This tradition of narrating colonial violence dates back to at least the 7th century BCE (e.g., Mimnermus of Smyrna, fr. 9 IEG, cited in Strabo, Geography 14.1.4) and becomes particularly prominent in Classical period literature (5th–4th century BCE). These texts frequently narrate earlier colonial campaigns from the Dark Ages and Archaic period (9th-6th century BCE), describing the total elimination or expulsion of local populations (e.g., Thucydides 6.3.2; Diodorus Siculus 11.76.3). A similar surge in elimination motives can be found in the literature of the Late Republican and Early Imperial period (1st century BCE - 1st century CE), which discusses both contemporary and earlier colonial campaigns (Roselaar 2010; Jewell 2019).

While these narratives suggest parallels between ancient and modern settler colonial practices, their accuracy is debated in current scholarship. Scholars question whether they depict actual historical events or are instead literary tropes rooted in propaganda traditions dating back to the Bronze Age, designed to exaggerate the scale and impact of colonization and conquest to reinforce power claims and elevate the victors' prestige. For the earlier phases of ancient colonial history (9th–6th century BCE), recent archaeological research has not substantiated these replacement narratives. Instead, it suggests that these early settlements adopted coexistence models, marked by limited conflict and minimal displacement (Osborne 1998; Crielaard & Burgers, 2012). This aligns with their modest demographic size—often numbering only a few hundred settlers, insufficient to dominate vast territories—and their lack of imperial support structures. Furthermore, the motivations for establishing these colonial settlements, as described in the sources, align more with necessity-driven colonization than with the structures characteristic of settler colonialism. Their foundations are depicted as responses to urgent challenges, such as fleeing famine or socio-political instability, and took place without the support of an imperial framework (Garland 2014, 34–38).

Yet, the sources also highlight an emancipatory dimension, as colonists set out with the promise of equality—receiving equal land allotments and political rights—opportunities that were often unattainable in their homelands (Malkin & Blok 2024). Colonial settlements in this period were mostly conceived as new, sovereign polities, independent both from the mother city and from the local populations whose lands they settled. This vision carried a utopian quality, resembling modern settler colonial social experiments in its aspiration for a fresh start and social reorganization. The focus on sovereignty and land offers a clear context in which these settlements could evolve into elimination projects. When the ambition for sovereignty is obstructed by the presence of indigenous populations, it may trigger violence and practices of replacement.

While archaeological evidence indicates that these settlements initially adopted cooperative strategies and had limited impact on the colonized territories and their populations, there is also evidence suggesting that over time many of these settlements expanded significantly, leading to conflicts and campaigns of elimination against the surrounding native populations (cf. below). In this regard, and perhaps similarly to the colonial settlements of the European Age of Exploration (1500-1650), these small-scale early settlements—though founded on a very different logic—eventually evolved into critical entry points and centers of knowledge in foreign territories, playing significant roles in later colonial developments that did result in processes of indigenous replacement and elimination. Moreover, the political culture that emerged in these early settlements, centered on promises of equality and land, fostered an environment where subsequent expansion could easily fuel practices of elimination.

This shift toward colonial practices more closely resembling modern settler colonialism can be roughly dated to the 6th and 2nd centuries BCE (Osborne 1998; Wilson 2006; Zuchtreigel 2018, 1-33) and coincides with a broader transformation in Mediterranean power structures, marked by popular movements challenging aristocratic dominance, which led to political and legal advancements for the middle and lower classes, as well as new interpretations of citizenship rights (Hammer 2015; Filonik et al. 2023). The militarization of these classes played a central role in expanding their political influence, contributing to the rise of participatory political systems or, through military clientelism, the emergence of strongman politicians. Amid an evolving ideology that linked political power and citizenship to land ownership, social emancipation became increasingly dependent on land redistribution programs, either within the homeland or through territorial expansion. In this context of rising territorial imperialism, ancient colonization underwent a fundamental transformation, shifting from a trade-focused model of small, independent coastal settlements to one targeting inland territories (Terrenato 2019, 73-108). This new model involved large populations and was closely tied to strategies of territorial control, expansion, and elimination (Zuchtreigel 2018, 1-33).



Current scholarship, however, does not offer a clear understanding of the extent to which this new colonial structure affected indigenous populations or whether it aligns with the criteria for identifying a logic of elimination. While most scholars assume it resulted in significant displacement or elimination, a revisionist view argues that it was primarily characterized by exploitative or even cooperative forms of domination (Bradley 2006; Terrenato 2019). This issue remains unresolved due to the lack of convincing quantitative data or methods to assess the impact of this new colonial model on indigenous population survival rates. Nevertheless, although the precise nature of elimination in ancient colonialism during this period cannot be fully reconstructed, it is clear that this era saw the development of a distinct colonial ideology, in which notions of elimination and replacement played a prominent role. More importantly, our sources offer valuable insights into the dynamics that shaped the development of this ideology and its practices, which are relevant to the broader study of settler colonialism.

Factors that triggered settler colonialism structures in Antiquity

The factors driving the change in colonial strategies in antiquity leading to more eliminatory practices are seldom explicitly detailed in literary sources, though occasional glimpses can be found. A notable example is the Greek colony of Cyrene, founded on the coast of present-day Libya in 631 BCE, for which relatively detailed accounts have survived. Initially, Cyrene was established as a modest settlement reliant on the goodwill of local powers and skilful negotiation for its survival. Over time, however, it evolved into a major hub for successive waves of colonial settlers from the Greek mainland, who increasingly dismantled indigenous structures and killed or displaced local populations (Herodotus 4.150–165). Importantly, Herodotus provides a key insight into the causes of this shift: the outbreak of violence seems to have been driven by socio-political dynamics in mainland Greece, which prompted mass-migration to Cyrene. This influx resulted in large-scale land annexation and redistribution, which sparked internal tensions and ultimately paved the way for Cyrene's transition from a monarchy to a democratic state. (Cecchet 2017; Malkin 2023). Similar patterns emerge elsewhere. For instance, in the colony of Heracleia in Pontus, radical land redistribution initiatives and the establishment of asymmetric legal and property regimes coincided with a period of intense social unrest and the rise of a populist tyranny (Burnstein 1976; Mandel 1988). This shift disrupted previously peaceful coexistence with indigenous populations, leading to conflict. Further evidence of this correlation can be found in Metapontion, where land division systems are plausibly linked to tyrannical rule (Carter 2006). These cases illustrate a pattern where land redistribution and the rise of participatory or populist regimes often led to violent conflicts with indigenous communities. Initially dependent on indigenous support, early



colonial settlements grew with incoming settlers, driven by demographic changes and political reforms, ultimately escalating tensions and resulting in land redistribution and eliminatory campaigns.

The structure of settler colonialism was not limited to developments within the colonies but was closely linked to dynamics in the imperial metropoles. Colonization during this period seems to have been deeply influenced by social pressures in these metropoles, driven by emerging emancipatory ideologies and imperial ambitions. Since emancipation depended on access to land and resources, it required either property redistribution or territorial expansion. Unsurprisingly, aristocrats typically favoured the latter, making warfare and territorial expansion central to participatory political systems. However, supporting land redistribution programs could also serve as a strategic move by ambitious elites to gain the support of the plebs, thereby enhancing their political standing. The dynamics driven by emancipatory agendas thus introduced chronic internal tensions, as the failure to address land demands could ignite populist movements calling for redistribution, ultimately threatening aristocratic power and property. To alleviate such potentially destabilizing pressures, aristocrats frequently turned to colonization as a means of diverting social unrest and preserving stability at home (for the modern world see Veracini 2021).

Interesting perspectives on this structural tension and the need for societies to build in "safety valve" strategies to reduce social tension survive especially in philosophical treatises. For example, Plato in his Laws portrays settler colonization as a mild form of civic purging, contrasting it with the harsher alternative of execution. He writes: "When, owing to scarcity of food, people are in want, and display a readiness to follow their leaders in an attack on the property of the wealthy,—then the lawgiver, regarding all such as a plague inherent in the body politic, ships them abroad as gently as possible, giving the euphemistic title of 'emigration' to their evacuation." (Laws 5.735c–d). Similarly, Isocrates, in his advice to Philip II, warns against the dangers posed by potentially unruly mobs, particularly discharged soldiers. He suggests settling them in newly founded colonies, which would serve a dual purpose: alleviating the threat of social unrest and revolution by removing these individuals from the heart of the empire, while simultaneously strengthening the imperial frontier (To Philip, 120–123, c. 342 BCE).

In the Roman context, similar patterns emerge, with colonial land redistribution programs often coinciding with periods of intense social conflict between patricians and plebeians, frequently culminating in policies of elimination (cf. Livy 4.47–4.51; Dion. Hal. 7.13–14). Especially the texts from the Late Republican and early Imperial periods are filled with purging metaphors that reflect elite fears of rising populism, mob movements, and demands for redistribution (Jewell 2019). These sources clearly portray settler colonization as a mechanism to mitigate such threats, while also suggesting it

played a central role in campaigns of elimination against indigenous populations (see for critical views Bradley 2006 and Patterson 2006).

A compelling example comes from Polybius (2nd century BCE). In contrast to Machiavelli's depiction of relatively restrained Roman expansion, Polybius recounts how Romans killed or displaced large numbers of Gauls to establish colonies in the Picenum region. The situation escalated a generation later under the populist leader Gaius Flaminius, who proposed to divide the entire territory among Roman citizens. This redistribution prompted the Gauls to declare war, perceiving the Romans' actions not as a bid for supremacy or sovereignty but as a campaign for their complete displacement and extermination (Polybius 2.19–21).

While these narratives often focus on the Roman state and the military as the primary agents of these clearing campaigns, these sources highlight that such campaigns were often initiated at the request of the plebs, rather than by the ruling elites. A telling example of this is the extermination of the people of Sora (4th century BCE), which happened after this Italic people had attacked Roman colonists in their former territory. Livy tells us that Rome sent out a retaliation campaign and that: "All those taken to Rome were scourged and beheaded to the great satisfaction of the plebs, who felt it to be a matter of supreme importance that those who had been sent out in such large numbers as colonists should be safe wherever they were" (Livy 9.24), and later on we read about the Roman people demanding the annihilation of the Aequi after another act of betrayal: "Within a fortnight they [the Romans] had stormed and captured thirty-one walled towns. Most of these were sacked and burned, and the nation of the Aequi was almost exterminated" (Livy 9.45).

Further echoing elements of modern settler colonial structures is the emphasis on large-scale land division and agriculture as the primary means of seizing indigenous territories, utilizing asymmetric property systems and occupation rights. Agriculture in Roman colonial contexts is viewed not only as a means of sustenance for settlers but also as a moral justification for claiming land, presenting it often as unused and therefore open to occupation. Additionally, agriculture is seen as a way to transform idle or "unproductive" people into useful citizen-soldiers (Pelgrom and Stek 2014; Pelgrom 2018). In this regard, settler colonialism acts as a form of social engineering, transforming 'undesirable' groups into useful elements in a cost-effective manner (Cassius Dio 38.1).

Finally, while the sources generally lack compassion for the fate of indigenous populations affected by this structure, later texts reveal a form of nostalgia, hinting at a longing for these disappearing cultures (e.g., Strabo, Geography 6.1.2-3; Emperor Claudius' lost work Tyrrhenika). This mirrors patterns observed in modern settler colonial contexts, where such sentiments arise during periods when indigenous territorial claims no longer challenge settler sovereignty. At these times, settler



colonial states often incorporate elements of indigeneity into their own identities to distinguish themselves from other states and strengthen their connection to the lands they occupy (Wolfe 2006).

To summarize, the ancient texts reveal a structure in which settler colonialism and its eliminatory logic emerge from the interaction between emancipatory forces advocating for equality and political freedom, grounded in agricultural property systems, and conservative aristocratic strategies aimed at channelling these forces toward frontier territories. This dynamic is driven by the rising political influence of urban lower-class populations, which threatens the aristocracy's control over power structures and mechanisms of property acquisition. To alleviate this pressure, a system develops to redirect these populations from the metropole with promises of a better life in settler colonies, simultaneously strengthening the empire's frontiers in a cost-effective manner. This process frequently culminates in elimination campaigns targeting those who obstruct the realization of these promises. Viewed this way, settler colonialism represents an emancipatory project for lower classes, achieved only at the expense of others.

However, the elite strategy of removing undesirable groups by offering promises of improvement and freedom could backfire, as it inadvertently nurtured the growth of liberal ideas and practices within colonial contexts. Colonization, in this sense, became a breeding ground for emancipatory ideologies, further fostering ideals of egalitarianism and political freedom. Once established and thriving, these colonial settlements, as examples of alternative socio-political models, had the potential to inspire and strengthen revolutionary political and social movements in the mother country (Malkin 2005, for such dynamic shaping the modern world see Dahl 2018).

Final reflections

An underlying question, which also intrigued ancient scholars, is why this structure—grounded in emancipatory forces and the pursuit of freedom—developed in some societies while these qualities seemed absent in others. This issue was particularly explored in the context of the Greco-Persian Wars, where the peoples of the Achaemenid Empire were often depicted as lacking such aspirations (Raaflaub 2004). While the accuracy of this depiction is questionable, it is notable that the Greek world fostered a sense of exceptionalism based on a perceived greater capacity for individuals to control their own destiny. This culture of freedom, as it has been described (Meier 2009), became a core element of Greek societal ideology and influenced their alleged cultural heirs, such as the Romans. Ancient explanations for this drive for freedom often pointed to geography and climate. The fragmented landscapes and micro-ecosystems of the Mediterranean, coupled with moderate temperatures, were believed to nurture independence, while vast, open, and warmer regions with uniformity of the seasons, were thought to promote submissiveness (Hippocrates, *De aere aquis et locis*, XVI; Aristotle, Pol. 7.7). Cold climates,



in this paradigm, were considered to foster a strong spirit of freedom but were deemed unsuitable for establishing stable societies and enduring political structures due to harsh living conditions, which often prompted migrations to more temperate regions.

This geographic explanation, with its racial undertones, does not resonate with most modern readers. However, contemporary scholarship continues to debate the origins of the so-called culture of freedom and whether it was truly a defining characteristic of Greek culture. One prominent line of inquiry connects the development of such ideals to early colonial experiences or the narratives about colonial adventures (Malkin 1998; 2011). It is perhaps no coincidence that societies known for participatory political systems and settler colonial structures—such as the Greeks, Carthaginians, and Romans—share deeply ingrained migratory origin myths. Typically, these cultures often trace their origins to an act of colonization rooted in deep, mythical history. The notable exception, perhaps, is Athens, which claimed autochthonous origins but nonetheless incorporated colonial narratives into its mythology, particularly regarding its role in the so-called Ionian migration.

These myths typically involve a population displaced by famine, warfare, or political strife, embarking on a journey in search of a new beginning. Particularly interesting in the light of Machiavelli's theory, is that several early Greek colonial narratives, such as Return of the Heracleidae or the Doric invasion myth, reflect an ancient belief that the origins of many Greek polities lay in migratory movements from northern regions like the Balkans or the Caspian steppe to the more temperate Mediterranean areas of modern-day Greece, connecting them to the necessity driven mass-migration movements. Whether these experiences were real or imagined, they may have fostered a cultural foundation grounded in self-governance, egalitarianism, and freedom. From this perspective, the settler colonialism structures that took shape during the emerging territorial empires of the Classical and Hellenistic periods, can be seen as extensions of an older cultural ethos. This ethos, centred on freedom and self-rule, may have developed from a foundational colonial narrative that shaped societal identity and values.

In conclusion, drawing from Machiavelli's model, one could argue that mass-migration driven by necessity—settler colonization—whether real or imagined, provides the ideological basis from which the structures of settler colonialism could develop in imperial contexts. In this process, historical experiences and foundational narratives that shape cultural identities played a key role. If this is correct, it raises the question of whether similar dynamics were at play in the early modern period (but see Owen and Hurst 2005 for the risks of using historical analogies in colonial discourses). During this time, the revival of classical culture may have reactivated settler colonial mythologies and ideologies of freedom (Pelgrom and Weststeijn 2020), which helped to foster intellectual and practical frameworks that ultimately fuelled settler colonial ambitions and the eliminatory logics associated with them (E.g.



Lipsius 1598, 1.6). Thus, the key insight from this essayistic attempt to integrate an ancient historical perspective into settler colonial discourse is the need to incorporate (ancient) ideological paradigms and (mytho-)historical frameworks when exploring the underlying dynamics of settler colonial structures (Lupher 2003; Kiernan 2007). The classical texts, alongside the biblical narratives that derived from the same chronological context, serve as foundational origin myths for the Western world, profoundly influencing societal developments and the evolution of settler colonial structures within it.

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Caesar's World Turned Inside Out? Roman Provincial Colonisation and the 'Settler Revolution' of the First Century BCE

Jitse Daniels

This essay was inspired mainly by Lorenzo Veracini's *The world turned inside out*, and an article written by Evan Jewell on colonisation and domestic displacement. Published in 2021, Veracini's study offers an explanation for the emergence of settler colonialism, focusing on metropolitan politics and, specifically, on policies of draining population surpluses. Similarly, Evan Jewell, while not writing within Settler Colonial Studies (SCS) discourse, seeks to explain Roman colonisation in a manner comparable to Veracini's analysis of modern settler colonialism. These works provide a productive foundation for reconsidering key aspects of Roman provincial colonisation, particularly its timing and purpose. The question which motivations lay behind sending out settlers looms large in the background, and it is here that SCS, in particular Veracini's recent work, may prove illuminating. One of the main issues that needs clarification is why there was an explosion of colonial foundations in the Roman provinces under Caesar and Augustus, while Rome had been very reluctant for most of its Republican history to found *coloniae* outside of Italy. Veracini's study can be a helpful starting point here. However, I will first zoom out somewhat to clarify how one could, I believe, apply colonial and settler colonial frameworks to the Roman context and how this may be helpful.

The Roman 'colonial situation' in the East until Caesar

Before addressing the motivations behind the surge in settler colonial foundations, it is important to first outline the context preceding Caesar's colonial program, with a focus on Roman expansion in the East. By the second half of the second century BCE, Greece (Achaea), Macedon, and Asia (western Turkey) had already been incorporated as Roman provinces. Interestingly, the Roman concept of a *provincia* is more akin to what is called an overseas colony in (early) modern contexts, whereas the Roman *colonia*, as I will explain below, signified something very similar to modern settler colonies, albeit small and clearly demarcated ones.

The distinction between a Roman *provincia* and *colonia* has parallels with the one made in SCS discourse between ('exploitative') colonialism and 'settler' colonialism: whereas colonialism aims at subjugating and exploiting the native population for their labour, settler colonists expel or exterminate

How to cite: J. Daniels, 'Caesar's World Turned Inside Out? Roman Provincial Colonisation and the 'Settler Revolution' of the First Century BCE', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Daniels

the native population in order to exploit the land themselves (Veracini 2011; Osterhammel 2021). These distinctions have been nuanced and challenged in ongoing discussions in SCS discourse, though, as will be explained, between *provinciae* and *coloniae* the distinctions are arguably much clearer than those made in the debate on colonialism vs. settler colonialism.

Parallels between 'colonies' and 'colonisation' of different eras have been drawn before of course, and not seldom invoke scepticism or confusion. Moses Finley, an influential scholar of ancient history, once attempted to establish a consistent, more specific definition, or typology, of what a colony is (Finley 1976). For him, a colony was first and foremost focused on land and its exploitation, which in the case of a proper colony, by his account, is often done by settlers from the metropolis. As he himself states, British India among many others are ruled out by this definition as colonies, but Roman *coloniae* and the British colonies in America are included. What Finley defined, then, comes very close to what would later be typified as a settler colony, as opposed to colonialism as it developed in British India. Finley too, emphasises the distinction between a *colonia* and a *provincia*, but compares them to what Wales and Ireland were to England rather than what India was for Britain (Finley 1976, 187), which I think is a little off the mark. Finley presents the Roman provinces as thoroughly incorporated into a cohesive empire, but it should be stressed that this reflects the situation only in the later periods of the Roman empire. The provinces were clearly marked as different from the Roman heartland and were exploited mainly to the benefit of the imperial centre.

A Roman *provincia* was basically a region to which a general or governor was sent out and to which his authority was delimited, though, since the institution evolved mainly according to pragmatic and ad hoc needs of Roman policy, there were significant administrative differences between provinces (Alejandro Díaz Fernández 2021) - much like, say, different territories of the British Empire. These regions were put under the sovereignty of a Roman governor, and were in time also structurally exploited not only by means of tax levies – for which local power structures were used as well as Roman contractors – but also by extracting natural resources and setting up (unequal) trade relations. The colonial relation between Rome and her provinces also shows that there was a very clear and lasting conceptual distinction between the homeland, namely Rome and Italy, and all of Rome's provinces. Italy was not subjected to the same exploitative regimes and did not know structural taxation (Bleicken 1974).

In the provinces of Greece (*Achaea*), Macedon and Asia, there were many different groups of Romans already present before any *colonia* was founded. Of course, there were the governor and his staff, along with other officials, and often a garrison of Roman legions, especially in unruly or frontier provinces. Besides these enforcers of empire, there were groups of Romans that can be characterised as the exploiting agents of empire. These groups mainly consisted of the *negotiatores*, the Roman

businessmen and traders of all kinds, and the *publicani*, who were the private contractors that levied taxes in the provinces for the Roman state.

Interesting in this context are recent studies on the role of landownership among these entrepreneurs, which have shown that the possession of land by Roman traders in the Greek world was more prevalent and more important to their business than previously thought. This knowledge has quite some implications for our perception of the role of businessmen in Roman imperialism. These wealthy landowning Romans created large agricultural and industrial estates that aimed at producing high-end products for export, mainly to Italy, such as olive oil, textiles, cattle and marble (Eberle and Le Quéré 2017, 27, 41-42; Zoumbaki 2012, 82-85). This, as two scholars have recently pointed out, is a much more direct exploitation of empire that resembles the situation in early modern colonial empires such as those of Spain, Britain and Holland (Eberle and Le Quéré 2017, 52).

In the present context, the three most important similarities between *provinciae* and modern overseas colonies are the following:

1. Both *provinciae* and modern overseas colonies came to be governed by metropolitan agents overseeing an indigenous population
2. In both cases there was a clear and perpetuated conceptual and legal distinction between metropolis and colony/*provincia*
3. Both saw a class of private traders and contractors that were indispensable for the exploitation of the *provincia*/colony

On account of these similarities, the comparison between *provinciae* and modern overseas colonies is a useful one, as it clarifies what provinces were in relation to actual Roman *coloniae*. In a way, these *coloniae* were pockets of settler colonies inserted into this larger colonial structure, which was, in must be stressed, already firmly anchored.

Pre-colonial Roman foundations in the east

This brings me to another aspect of the pre-Caesarean situation in the Greek provinces which I want to address, namely the urban centres founded by Pompey that came to function as administrative centres for Roman governors. They are relevant here because they form an alternative to Roman colonisation in that they fulfil some of the same functions as urban centres that *coloniae* could fulfil. This is often neglected when historians discuss the role of Roman colonies in the eastern provinces.

When Pompey had subjugated Anatolia in the mid-1st century BCE, he moved about pacifying and reorganising the region, creating several new provinces (Eilers 2005, 90-91). Between 88 and 63 BCE, wars were fought against Mithridates, the king of Pontus (i.e. northern Anatolia), who had incited



rebellions throughout Rome's eastern provinces. This had greatly shaken Rome's hold on the region and had led to great massacres of the Romans living among the native population. Rome had cracked down hard on those who had joined Mithridates' side, and Romans supporting the imperial apparatus had flowed back in as soon as Rome regained control of Asia and many newly acquired territories (Santangelo 2007, 50-67, 107-134). Like in Asia, for convenient administration the provinces were divided up into administrative units which needed urban centres. Especially in Pontus, where no urban administrative centres had formed, Pompey found that such urban centres needed to be created (Sherwin-White 1984, 229-230). For this, he resorted to the Greek practice of synoecism, creating new civic units with an urban nucleus by moving and combining the surrounding population into that new unit (Jones 1987, 104-105). That Pompey opted for this Greek urban model is very understandable in this context: given the mainly Greek culture of the region it would have been much easier to anchor Greek-style urban centres which were more familiar to local elites – cooperation with the local elites while subjugating such a gigantic region was key (Sherwin-White 1984, 226-229; Gelzer 1949, 105-107).

The interesting point is that these cities functioned well as administrative centres and could be anchored easily in the Greek urban and political system. In this way, they are arguably much more desirable than *coloniae* for anchoring Roman rule without disrupting the social and political hierarchy as much. The fact that Pompey chose this path even in a time and place where military control seemed highly desirable, makes one doubt that Roman colonies were mainly means of military control or urbanisation during this period. In fact, Augustus too would not seldom opt for this type of city-founding. In Epirus and Egypt Augustus founded new Greek port cities, and in Anatolia, Augustus used the same process of synoecism to found the cities of Pessinus, Tavium and Ancyra (modern-day Ankara), in order to urbanise regions that knew no urban centres (Mitchell 1993, 80-81). Thus, this excursus shows that the Romans had other effective methods for urbanising and controlling regions that were less disruptive to elite exploitation structures than founding large settler colonies.

To summarise, there was already a significant Roman presence in the provinces, with businessmen, traders, and governors active in the region. Roman military leaders and imperial administrators had already experimented with methods for creating new urban centers without founding colonies. It was within this complex context that the *coloniae* of Caesar and Augustus were established—not on terra nullius or in hostile, barbarian lands, but in highly urbanised regions with established civic cultures, where Romans had already set up an imperial colonial structure. This leads to the question: what role did the *colonia* serve in Roman imperialism?

Roman coloniae: Modern research

Studies on Roman *coloniae* in the Greek east have traditionally focused on their foundation, their distribution, their military or economic role, and the provenance of the colonists (Vittinghoff 1952; Salmon 1969; Bowersock 1981). Historians have often explained colonies in military-strategic or sometimes in economic terms. Scholars have long known settling demographic surpluses to have been an important function of *coloniae*, but the implications of this should be pursued further. While there have recently been many studies on individual *coloniae* and their development over time, there is now more need for re-evaluation of the imperial political aspect of colonisation. There is no satisfactory explanation why so many *coloniae*, which were populated for a large part by the urban plebs of Rome, were founded in the provinces roughly at the same time.

It is here that a deeper focus on the sociopolitical motivations of Roman colonisation is necessary, for which SCS may prove very helpful. Veracini's *The world inside out* may be used to provide a useful framework from which to depart. In that work, Veracini addresses the question of how and why so many settlers got where they are today, leaving their metropoles behind and building communities elsewhere (Veracini 2021). He argues that settler colonialism, climaxing in a true settler revolution in the nineteenth century, constitutes a transnational political logic that, in order to prevent revolution, aims at voluntary displacement of impoverished population surpluses from the metropole. Such a political tradition seems clearly visible in the Roman context as well. And viewed within this context, we might identify something resembling a 'settler revolution' in the first century BCE under Caesar. Two important points follow from this comparison that can bring us closer to understanding the sudden colonisation of Rome's provinces in the first century BCE. Firstly, a political logic similar to that which Veracini has identified, i.e. stimulating 'colonial' migration in order to prevent revolution in the metropole, was present in Rome (as substantiated by Evan Jewell 2019). Secondly, something crucial had changed during Caesar's reign that explains this sudden Roman settler revolution, which moved Caesar to successfully plant settler colonies into Rome's provincial territories. The reason for this, I think, lies in internal Roman social and political processes, rather than in the provinces themselves. After all, we know that Caesar and Augustus stood at the beginning and the end of a fundamental regime change in the Roman empire. The foundation of Roman *coloniae* at this time in the east, I argue below, can be understood through their role in facilitating and stabilizing a regime change at the core of the empire.

Roman coloniae as a means of anchoring a regime change?

Recent studies on the previously mentioned Roman businessmen exploiting the provinces support the view that these *coloniae* were inserted into, and even disrupted an existing colonial structure. Particularly relevant is the observation that not only the indigenous population, but the Romans already living in Greece too, experienced disruption due to the influx of settlers. One study has shown that the Roman elite owned land in many parts of Greece, also where *coloniae* were founded, such as Butrint in Epirus. There is a case known concerning Titus Pomponius Atticus' estates near Butrint which were threatened to be incorporated in the Caesarean *colonia* that was planned there (Cic. *Att.* 16.16B.3-4). Atticus (a well-known and very wealthy member of the Roman elite) lobbied hard to save his estates, but due to the chaos after Caesar's assassination his efforts were in the end fruitless (Eberle, and Le Quéré 2017, 37; Deniaux 1987, 250-253). This is a clear example of how the wave of settler colonial foundations in the east could come into conflict with the Romans that were already running businesses in the provinces. The crucial point here is that *coloniae* could very well disrupt the provincial (that is, colonial?) system of exploitation that was already in place - they did not simply support or reinforce that system.

On the other hand, the foundation of Roman *coloniae* naturally entailed the creation of many more Italian landowners in Greece. The interesting difference between the two groups is that these colonists were far greater in number and were mainly simple, lower class Romans - not commercial big shots from the upper classes of Rome. In Italy the tensions between elite property and proletarian poverty had been a recurring issue, and now Caesar brought this class struggle to the provinces, in a way, by settling proletarians there in great numbers. Here, then, we observe something corresponding to a settler colonial logic as Veracini explained it, in that Caesar exported an internal class struggle. According to Veracini's logic, this exportation was to prevent a regime change, and, according to Evan Jewell, this colonisation programme was the result of an elite solidarity based on a fear of proletarian insurrection. However, there is a problem that complicates Jewell's argument.

Put briefly, elite solidarity in the late Republic is an illusion. In fact, the voices that had often propagated settler colonial policies in Rome did not belong to a monolithic elite, but rather belonged to a succession of dissident groups who can be described as populists, starting with the Gracchi (two politicians from the 2nd century BCE who turned against the Senatorial majority and who mainly pursued land distributions and colonisation). Caesar's colonial politics has often been described as being firmly grounded in the Gracchan tradition, aiming at the provision of land for the landless poor to settle (Brunt 1971, 256). There was therefore no elite consensus on how to 'drain the masses', i.e. on settler colonial policies, to prevent a revolution. Settler colonial policies were a deeply divisive issue and were mainly used by the Gracchan 'populists' to further their political agenda. Caesar, put simply, was the first one



who succeeded in pushing through such an agenda. Thus it rather seems that Caesar initiated a 'settler revolution' not to prevent a revolution at home, but to anchor his own.

The fact that a few decades earlier Sulla, an oligarch at the head of his own conservative, elitist faction, had exactly the opposite policies in mind for the Roman provinces, makes this point all the more interesting. Sulla conspicuously did not found any *coloniae* in the provinces, while as a dictator he was in the perfect position to do so. At the same time the data collected by recent studies shows that private Roman landownership in the provinces grew spectacularly after Sulla had subdued the eastern provinces that had rebelled against Rome (Eberle and Le Quéré 2017, 30-32). Sulla thus practically reserved the provinces for the elite to exploit.

In this context, could it be justified to see the Caesarean colonisation programme as a means of opening up the provinces to the proletariat while curbing the (economic) privileges and influence that the senatorial elite had enjoyed in the provinces? The internal Roman class struggle, which, simply put, boils down to a struggle over how the spoils of Empire were to be divided, is with the Caesarean colonisation programme settled more in favour of the lower classes. Of course, Caesar expected political endorsement in return, and could have relied on political support from his *coloniae*. It seems, then, that Caesar's settler colonies were meant to help control the provincial imperial structure on his behalf. This structure, after all, was set up by the system preceding Caesar's coup, and might have had different political and economic priorities. The colonies might in this way have supported Caesar's regime change. In any case, Caesar clearly deemed the foundation of dozens of colonies throughout the provinces a desirable way to bring change to the previous system - for change the colonies brought. That Caesar, a political dissident standing in the Gracchan tradition, now had absolute political control might then provide the best explanation for why it was at this time that Rome suddenly and vigorously planted dozens of settler colonies throughout its overseas empire. The question why this particular mode of domination was deemed most suitable by this 'Gracchan faction' and by Augustus is the larger issue needing explanation – one that most definitely needs more attention than is available in the span of this essay.

This brief study indicates that internal political and ideological principles had a strong influence on the timing and nature of the colonisation process of the first century BCE. Recent studies on Roman *coloniae* in the east do not often consider the influence of such political ideas on Roman colonisation. As I have tried to substantiate, the settler colonial logic identified by Veracini provides a good framework with which to rectify this, although I have also argued that the internal politics of Rome do not reflect a straightforward elite logic of displacing the proletariat; this issue was embedded in more complicated political and ideological struggles that, when researched more thoroughly, may explain



better why Rome knew such a sudden settler revolution under Caesar, when he decided to insert dozens of miniature settler colonies in the Roman empire overseas.

Reflecting on Settler Colonial Studies, and in particular on the internal dynamics of the metropole and its role in initiating settler colonialism, this essay suggests seeing the metropole as a multi-layered phenomenon. Of course, Settler Colonialism's strength as a concept lies in its capacity to examine overarching socioeconomic and -political structures, necessitating a high degree of abstraction. However, it might be fruitful to dissect the metropole to enable inquiring – within the Settler Colonial structure – how different parties or factions within the metropole competed with each other behind the scenes to push through their own desired mode of colonisation and domination. After all, recent research has identified numerous such different modes of colonialism (for an overview see Veracini 2023, 1-3). These inquiries can, in turn, illuminate how specific modes of domination benefited particular political, social, or economic classes and the mechanisms through which these benefits were realised.

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Reason of State Literature in Dutch Colonial Practice: Pieter van Hoorn in Batavia

Dinah Wouters

What role do intellectual arguments in favour of settler colonialism play in the practice of colonial administrators? During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europeans not only founded settler colonies, they also wrote theories about the benefits that this specific form of colonialism could bring to a state. I will discuss the example of a colonial administrator whose correspondence shows that he had read this kind of political philosophy extensively and who based practical decisions on this knowledge. The name of this administrator is Pieter van Hoorn, who was a member of the Council of the Indies from 1663 to 1677. The Council of the Indies was an administrative body located in Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies, whose task it was to advise the governor-general.

The Dutch context makes the case more special, because the Dutch Republic did not have large settler communities and was hesitant about promoting them because that would potentially endanger the trade monopoly by the Dutch East India Company. Van Hoorn's voice testifies to a pro-settler discourse that is not often remembered in scholarship. In a letter to the Directors of the East India Company in 1675, he argued for the relative independence of the colony of Batavia, and he did so on the basis of theoretical literature on Roman colonialism and the lessons that modern states should learn from it. The combination of the two gives an insight into the role of reason of state literature in interpreting practical circumstances.

In Settler Colonial Studies (SCS), the primary focus has traditionally been on material factors, such as socio-economic and demographic dynamics, that shape settler colonial structures. This contribution, however, highlights the crucial role of intellectual discourses in the development of settler colonial politics. By examining the influence of ideas, narratives, and ideologies, it reveals how these discourses not only reflected but had the potential to actively drive the establishment and maintenance of settler colonial systems, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their formation and endurance.

The Dutch debate over settler colonialism

Initially, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) had no intention of establishing settler colonies. Throughout the seventeenth century, there were occasional arguments—both from within and outside

How to cite: D. Wouters, 'Reason of State Literature in Dutch Colonial Practice: Pieter van Hoorn in Batavia', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Wouters

the VOC—that it might be advantageous to create settler communities in the East Indies, modelled after Spanish or Portuguese colonies. Looking at the contemporary Spanish and Portuguese Empires, and frequently also at the Roman Empire, these people argued that Dutch power overseas could not in the long term be maintained only by means of soldiers, a handful of traders and administrators, Chinese middlemen and local people, as the latter two groups could not be trusted and the former were too few. However, such proposals were fundamentally incompatible with the VOC's functioning as a trading company. Holding an exclusive monopoly on trade east of the Cape, the VOC effectively prohibited private initiatives by Dutch citizens, cutting off potential settlers from their most likely source of income. For settler communities to thrive overseas, the trade monopoly would have needed to be relaxed. As a result, arguments in favour of settler colonialism repeatedly clashed with the economic priorities of the VOC and its highly profitable monopoly.

In the first decades of the seventeenth century, some governors-general, such as Jan Pietersz Coen, wrote to Amsterdam asking for colonists, especially women, so that they would be able to maintain a viable Dutch society overseas. Others, such as Hendrik Brouwer, were completely against the idea and thought that soldiers would be better off marrying local women. In general, Dutch women who came to the colony seem to have had no desire to stay for longer than needed to make some money; people like Brouwer had a low opinion of these women and thought that local women would provide a more stable home and healthier children (Taylor 2004, 14).

In the 1640s, the discussion was taken up again by the Board of Directors (Heren XVII). The Directors in Amsterdam then asked the Council of the Indies, the advisory body to the Governor-General in Batavia, for advice on the question of opening up the Company's monopoly on trade: should Dutch citizens in the colonies be allowed to participate in trade, or should this remain the prerogative of the Company? Most members of the Council declared themselves not in favour of this. Some of them would have liked more permanent Dutch settlers, in principle, but they were convinced that this was not feasible in practice, even if the trading monopoly was not continued. This mostly had to do with the kind of Dutch people who were willing to go to the colonies: these poor and uneducated people were not seen as trustworthy settlers.

Only one member of the council, Johan Maetsuycker, advised in favour of settlers. In his lengthy advice, he first summarised all the arguments of the opponents: that settlers would be made up of the worst elements in society, that they would not be loyal, that they would not be able to make a living, and that they would return home as soon as they had made some money. Although Maetsuycker agreed with these arguments to a certain extent, he did think it possible to create a thriving settler colony under the right conditions. If the colony has a good government and upright laws, immoral people can be turned into good citizens. In order to make loyal citizens out of these poor migrants, however, you

have to make some concessions and trust them with a part of the trade that is now monopolised by the Company.

The directors in Amsterdam did not follow Maetsuycker's advice, but the advice of the majority to keep the trade monopoly and not to allow settler colonialism. They took the definite decision in 1652 and after that, the discussion seems to have died down until the 1660s. In the meantime, Johan Maetsuyker became governor-general, a position he held for 25 years until his death in 1678. During the 1660s, tentative steps were taken to create a positive climate for Dutch settlers: the foundation of a Latin school, the partial opening up of the trade monopoly, and the allowance for more migrants from the Republic to travel to the colony. However, after the disastrous year of 1672, when the Republic was attacked by almost all its neighbours, the whole situation changed. The Republic was at war and struggling, could not import as much and pay as much, and the Company was no longer making a profit. They blamed this on the opening up of trade and imposed a very strict trade monopoly again.

Johan Maetsuyker and the other members of the Council of the Indies did not agree, and Pieter van Hoorn, one of the members of the Council, wrote a letter to Amsterdam in which he took the pro-settler stance much further than Maetsuyker had done 25 years earlier. He argued that a colony could only flourish if it was largely independent of the metropole. Especially in the crucial early stages, it should not be burdened by taxes or trade restrictions, and it should not be guided by the self-centred, profit-driven considerations of others, but led by a local council that has the colony's own best interests at heart. The Company consistently acted against the interests of Batavia, not only by enforcing the trade monopoly, but also by prioritising new conquests and involvement in local military conflicts over the sustainable expansion of agriculture around Batavia.

Not unexpectedly, this letter was not well received in Amsterdam. Instead of listening to Maetsuyker and Van Hoorn, the board of directors listened to the advice of Rijcklof van Goens, another member of the Council of the Indies who was to succeed Maetsuyker as governor-general. Van Goens had a completely different view of Batavia, and was very much in favour of enforcing the trade monopoly coupled with military expansion. In 1677, five older members of the Council of the Indies, including Pieter van Hoorn, were dismissed. These were probably the ones in favour of more independence for the local community. Despite these setbacks, in 1678 the son of van Hoorn, Johan van Hoorn, as the new governor-general, began to colonise the area around Batavia, bringing in surveyors to draw up maps of ownership.

Settler colonialism as a secret to success

Although his proposal was not accepted, a closer look at the arguments presented in Van Hoorn's letter is interesting because it makes extensive use of what is known as reason of state literature. This genre was developed from the end of the sixteenth century by authors such as Nicolo Machiavelli, Giovanni Botero, Jean Bodin, Justus Lipsius and Arnold Clapmar. Their idea was that the survival and the success of states must be underpinned by empirically proven principles. So these authors delved into history in search of the secrets of the rise and fall of states and empires, the so-called *arcana imperii*. One of these secrets was settler colonialism. Van Hoorn's advice refers to all the major discussions of colonisation as a secret of empire that were available at the time.

First, it draws on the work of Carlo Sigonio. This sixteenth-century Italian humanist had analysed the socio-political history of the Roman Republic and its spread in Italy in his *works De antiquo iure civium Romanorum* (1560) and *De antiquo iure Italiae* (1560) (McCuaig 1989). He was the first to stress that the Roman colonies had advantages other than military ones, stating that the establishment of colonies and the distribution of land served as a remedy for overpopulation and social conflict in Rome (Pelgrom and Weststeijn 2020). Van Hoorn mentions both types of benefits.

Second, to the classical distinction between colonies founded by a free group of refugees and colonies founded by people sent out by a state (as it is found for instance in the commentary of Servius on Vergil's *Aeneid* 1.12), van Hoorn adds a further distinction within the second type of colony, namely between colonies founded in the country itself by people born there, or by foreigners in distant countries. The first category seems to refer to the colonisation of either wastelands or neighbouring territories. Van Hoorn has an interesting way of expressing this distinction. He says that "a colony under another's rule is founded and extended in the same country and under the same jurisdiction and rule where the mother of the colony resides and rules; or a colony is founded and extended outside a country, jurisdiction and rule of the mother of the colony and where the mother does not reside" (de Jonge 1872, 131). This seems to imply that overseas colonies are not under the jurisdiction and government of the metropole. Read in the context of Dutch colonisation, this makes sense, because the East India Company was essentially a commercial enterprise, albeit one that could exercise state power in some respects, such as waging war and negotiating treaties. The Dutch Empire saw itself as a maritime empire, and as Hugo Grotius had said, no one can claim dominium or imperium over the seas. As a general statement about overseas colonies, however, it sounds strange to say that a colony overseas falls outside the jurisdiction and rule of the metropole.

Van Hoorn continues by saying that a colony that is not free, because it is founded on the orders of a republic or monarchy, will never flourish as long as it is expected to serve the interests of the metropole and not its own. This can be read in the context of the next few paragraphs of the letter, where

van Hoorn gives a list of twenty characteristics of successful colonies. This list is almost entirely taken from Francis Bacon's essay *Of Plantations*, although van Hoorn does not make the attribution explicit. The Latin translation of Bacon's collection of essays, *Sermones Fideles Sive Interiora Rerum* had been printed in 1638 and again in 1641 in Leiden. With Bacon, van Hoorn argues that a colony is like a tree: when you plant it, you should give it time to grow and not expect to reap the fruits of your labour for at least twenty years. Therefore, it is absolutely detrimental to leave the care of a colony in the hands of merchants who think only of short-term profits. In the early years of a colony, it should not be expected to pay taxes and should be allowed to establish itself through free trade. It should not get involved in local conflicts and conquests, but should concentrate on itself first. Also, the colony should not depend on too large a council in the metropole, but on a small number of people, as this makes its government more effective.

All of these points, first made by Francis Bacon, are very fitting to the case van Hoorn wishes to make. He analyses the stunted growth of Batavia as the result of mismanagement by a commercial enterprise that thinks only in terms of profit. It attracts idlers and adventurers, and whenever it has built up a semblance of a stable population, people are sent elsewhere to new colonies. It does not develop outside the city walls, where the farmland is a constant target for raiders. And worst of all, it is burdened with military expeditions and new conquests that it cannot possibly sustain, so its very existence is constantly threatened. His advice was specifically directed against the plans of another member of the Council of the Indies, Rijckloff van Goens, who had recently conquered Ceylon and proposed to make it the capital of the Dutch East Indies instead of Batavia. Van Hoorn protested against this new conquest and warned of imperial overstretch, as the funds that would be used to defend the new conquests would not be used to expand the existing settler colony. He strongly protested against the idea that a settler colony could simply be abandoned and rebuilt elsewhere. With Bacon, he says that a settler colony should never be uprooted and abandoned.

Subsequently, van Hoorn also refers to Machiavelli by saying that a republic should periodically purify itself by returning to its first principles (de Jonge 1872, 141; Weststeijn 2014, 26). In the case of Batavia, this would mean returning it to the condition of a military bulwark and trading post. Van Hoorn would see this as relief from the heavy responsibilities over conquered territories that Batavia now bears. However, he also says that the colony has now progressed too far. Batavia has long since become a colony, and the difference between a conquest and a colony is that you can abandon the former, but not the latter. So the Company now has a responsibility to let Batavia develop itself into a thriving colony, which means that its citizens must be able to participate in trade and manage their own affairs, with an eye to the long-term welfare of the community.

Finally, van Hoorn refers to a statement by Velleius Paterculus, a Roman historian from the first century AD. Van Hoorn calls him 'Paberculus', suggesting that he was not familiar with the full text but may have read about it in a discussion on Roman colonialism. Paterculus claimed that the Romans made a mistake when they first established colonies outside of Italy. He said that they had always avoided doing so before, because they had seen how Greek and Phoenician colonies could become more powerful than their founding city. Van Hoorn quotes this but notes that it is probably too late for this particular secret of empire. Basing himself on reason of state literature, he is convinced that an empire needs to work on coherence before it can expand further. In this way, he can argue that Batavia must first be consolidated as the capital colony of Dutch trade in the East Indies, before the capital is moved to new locations or new colonies are founded.

Insights in settler colonialism

The central argument of settler colonial studies is that settler colonialism has its own dynamic, different from colonialism without large settler communities. Van Hoorn's letter to the Directors of the East India Company in Amsterdam shows not only that he derives this same insight from his reading of reason of state literature, but that it is an insight that shapes his understanding of the Dutch colonies and the course that the Company should take.

Van Hoorn does not say that settler colonisation is a superior way of building an empire. He admits that the Dutch Republic could have chosen to build their colonial empire solely on trading posts and conquests - although this might be a rhetorical strategy. However, a settler colony is different from a trading post or fortress. It is a community that must be able to develop itself. Once you have established a settler colony, you need a different colonial strategy, which includes not only commercial and military interests, but also a plan for the population of the colony. This introduces a completely new perspective into the Dutch debate on the advantages of settler colonialism. All other proponents of settler colonialism envision that settlers will best serve the commercial or political interests of the metropolis. This might also be van Hoorn's final aim, but he also strongly advocates for the relative political autonomy and self-determination of the colony. Copying Francis Bacon, van Hoorn states that it is a moral duty never to abandon a settler colony, even if it should never have been started in the first place! This seems significant in the light of settler colonial studies because it creates a teleology for the colony that is separate from the interests of the metropolis. The founding of a colony then sets in motion a process of land division and expansion that should not be halted or impeded.

In the context of Batavia, however, this theory clashed not only with the commercial interests of the East India Company, but also with practical limitations. Although van Hoorn emphasised

agriculture and expansion around the colony of Batavia, he knew that such large-scale migration was highly unlikely. It was difficult to even find people in the homeland who were willing to migrate (Klooster 2016, 189–98), and when van Hoorn's son eventually began to cultivate the surrounding lands, he worked mostly with the existing Chinese middle class, not with Dutch settlers (Blussé, 2023).

Nevertheless, I find it significant that we encounter this kind of ideological argument, rooted in political philosophy and classical knowledge, in a letter written by a Dutch colonial administrator to the VOC. First, even in the seventeenth century, the Dutch preferred to speak about their colonial project in commercial and practical terms; overtly ideological and political discourses are more rare (Raben 2013). We see this in the debate about settler colonialism: the debate revolves less about the reasons why one would or should send settlers overseas than about how these settlers can make a living without commercially competing with the VOC. Second, although the Dutch had a few minor settler colonies, they did not practice settler colonialism on a large scale during this time. Even so, we find a colonial administrator in Batavia who not only defended his colony as an autonomous political unity with its own teleology, but who was willing to call upon all the reason of state literature that was available to make his case. This demonstrates both how quickly settler communities began to agitate against the idea of servility to the metropole, but also how fundamental the role of ideology and classical knowledge could be.

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When Does a Settler Become an Ancient Settler?

Mark L. Thompson

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the historical category of settler in relation to the field of settler colonial studies (SCS). Such reflection also requires considering the category of native as its counterpart and nominal antagonist, of course. As the Ugandan scholar of colonialism Mahmood Mamdani writes, "Settlers and natives belong together. You cannot have one without the other, for it is the relationship between them that makes one a settler and the other a native." Within the broader field of colonial studies, including SCS, these binary categories of settler and native are often applied to historical (and contemporary) populations in a matter-of-fact way. Yet as Mamdani and his later interlocutors have pointed out, making such distinctions can be far from straightforward in practice (Mamdani 1998, Mamdani 2020).

Indeed, as Yuval Evri and Hagar Kotef argue in a recent essay responding to Mamdani, such complications of the settler-native binary raise difficult questions about concepts and claims that are central to SCS. If the key distinction between settler and native isn't "strictly racial," but rather "a geographical binary, between those who were in the land and those who came to it from outside (invaded)," how does one make sense of the various histories and genealogies of being in the land (and being invaded) alongside the historical mutability of the statuses of insider and outsider? What does it mean if "a group of people can hold, at different historical moments (and sometimes simultaneously), the positions of both settler and native"? (Evri and Kotef, 2022).

Here I would like to consider the example of a category of settlers in British America who came to be known variously as "ancient settlers," "ancient planters," and "old settlers." These overlapping sets of terms all referred to a class of settlers who had some claim to precedence within a particular colony or settlement because they (or their direct ancestors) belonged to the first, original, and/or founding population of settlers in that place. "Ancient" in this respect might be read to mean merely "(very) old," but it could also suggest a kind of originary and special status that derived from its "antique" character, so to speak. In a sense, these settlers were akin to being "native" colonizers, and their descendants, natives of and to the colony, often inherited or claimed this status, as well. The modifier ancient also points to the significance time and memory had in colonizing populations' conceptions of themselves. Patrick Wolfe may have been right that settler colonialism is "a structure[,] not an event," but these actors understood colonization as a persistent historical "structure" operating through time as well as the product of a specific originary "event" situated in the time of the past (Wolfe 2006, 388). Even so, the explicit link to the (distant) past also suggested a sense of archaism. To be

How to cite: M.L. Thompson, 'When Does a Settler Become an Ancient Settler?', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Thompson



"ancient" implied that these first settlers had been succeeded not only by their own native-born descendants but also by latecomers who were somehow distinct from them. There was a suggestion that these later arrivals, whatever their origins, ought to show some deference if not gratitude to this cohort of hardy pioneers who established the foundation for the more stable and successful settlement that followed.

This distinction between generations of settlers is something that often seems to be missing in my (admittedly selective) readings in SCS. There, as in much other theorization about colonies, settler colonies are often presumed to originate at a single moment from a single transplanted national group and develop in a linear, organic fashion from that point. In Wolfe's formulation of SCS, the particular conditions at the founding "event" of a colony are explicitly considered to be less significant than the systematic processes of elimination and replacement that form the general "structure" of settler colonialism thereafter. Establishing the basic oppositional categories of settler and native appears to be more fundamental to understanding the colonial process than is specifying who those settlers and natives actually were or how they came to acquire those statuses in the first place.

By contrast, the mainstream historiography of colonial North America typically places great emphasis on the importance of founding eras and populations and on the subsequent development of distinctive creole colonial cultures and settler societies over time. In particular, one of the key concepts for characterizing colonial cultural formation is that of the "charter group" (or, relatedly, "charter generation"), which refers to the first group of migrants to a new colony and their ability to determine the norms and institutions to which later groups must adapt themselves (Porter 1965; Higham 1968; Breen 1985; Berlin 1996). This is a useful concept in certain respects, but (like SCS) it tends to assume a linear and singular process of cultural transfer and development beginning with an influential original group of settlers who were sharply distinguished from native populations as well as from later "immigrants." Yet, empirically speaking (and imperially speaking), many colonial societies had complex, plural origins in which categorizations of settler and native were not always so simple or so straightforward.

Consider, for example, the descendants of the Finns and Swedes who addressed Pennsylvania's provincial assembly in 1709. In their petition they complained about the way the leading proprietary official in the colony, James Logan, had "fraudulently" taken away their patents and forced them to pay higher quitrents. They identified themselves as "we the Sweeds, antient Setlers (sic?) and first inhabitants of this Province," emphasizing the fact that their settlement of the Delaware Valley preceded the founding of Pennsylvania itself (1681). The petitioners traced their ancestry back over half a century to the colony of New Sweden (1638-1655), which had been established before William Penn was born. Their presence along the river also antedated the previous English colonial regime that had governed

the European settlers along the river (New York: 1664-1673; 1674-1681) and was contemporaneous to the rival Dutch colonial regime based at Manhattan that eventually conquered them in 1655 (New Netherland: ca. 1624-1654; 1655-1664; 1673-74). By contrast, the mostly British-descended members of the Pennsylvania Assembly who considered their petition were either relative or actual newcomers to the region, even if they may have belonged to that initial privileged group of settler-investors in Pennsylvania known as the "First Adventurers" (Thompson 2013; Thompson 2022).

To be an "ancient settler" in this case was to belong to a class of settlers who possessed land titles that predated those that had been issued and authorized by the current colonial regime. A related term, "ancient planter," was much more common during the seventeenth century. (Indeed, in Anglophone writing the term planter would remain far more popular than settler during the eighteenth century. The term settler in the sense of "colonist" was used either rarely or not at all until the 1680s, and through the end of the eighteenth century usually referred to people who were in the act of settling "new" lands.) In Virginia, for example, the aggrieved first generation of settlers were already calling themselves "ancient planters" by the mid-1620s, less than twenty years after the colony's founding (Briefe Declaration 1624). Meanwhile, in 1684, a group of "ancient Swedes" in Pennsylvania prepared an affidavit on William Penn's behalf to counter Lord Baltimore's claims along the west side of the Delaware River. There they referred to themselves as the "ancient Planters … of the Swedish Nation." Testifying in defense of Penn's claims as proprietor of Pennsylvania, they asserted that they "did anciently purchase of the Natives the Lands" along the western shore that Lord Baltimore was claiming under his charter for Maryland (Dunlap and Weslager 1967). Indeed, it was their status as "first purchasers" of (ancient) native lands that cemented their status as ancient settlers on this land. Among the later signers of the 1709 petition were these men's children, who also claimed this status for themselves.

Later, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term "ancient settler" would also be used in the United States to refer to already established settler populations who had held property within "foreign" (colonial) territories that were later incorporated into the USA (such as Louisiana, Illinois, and California). British Canadians also referred to French inhabitants within Canada as "ancient settlers" well into the nineteenth century. In each case, a long-established population possessed some local influence and recognition but did not necessarily (or usually) possess much power. In fact, the claim to "ancient settler" status often seemed to be conditioned by a general state of weakness. These settlers were articulating a rhetorical claim to be a privileged charter group exactly because they had lost the actual capacity to assert that claim against another, more powerful chartered group.

But to claim "ancient settler" status was also to assert that one was not native (and not a Native). These "old settlers" did not want to be overwhelmed by the new settler regime; indeed, they wanted to



be recognized as its original founders even if they had lost whatever claims they may have had to have been its rulers. In order to gain this recognition, they often made exaggerated claims about dominating the people they sometimes called the "ancient inhabitants" of the region, namely the Indians. For example, at the very start of the Finns' and Swedes' petition in 1709, they wrote that they had originally settled the province "with great difficulty hazard and loss of severall of our lives" and only later "obtained peace and quietnes with the Indians." Since then, they had lived under "divers sorts of governments … peaceably and quietly unmolested, enjoying our lands and estates, which we first settled under our own government." In similar appeals before and after, "the Swedes" would emphasize not only that they had first settled the region but that they had also first pacified the Indians, too. They made such claims despite the fact—or because of the fact—that after a half century of relations with the Lenape of the Delaware River, they were seen as "half Indians, when the English arrived in the year 1682," as Finnish-Swedish naturalist Pehr Kalm wrote in the mid-1700s (Kalm 1770-1771). (The claim may not have been merely rhetorical—historian Jean Soderlund has speculated that there may have been undocumented intermarriage between Finnish and Swedish men and Lenape women dating back to the seventeenth century (Soderlund 2015, 68).) Moreover, as the affidavit from 1683 made clear, these settlers and their descendants often traced their land titles to purchases they had made directly from the "original owners," the Lenapes. For generations afterwards, they would claim special "Indian rights" to lands across the region that they traced back to these "ancient" purchases (Thompson 2022).

These colonists made a claim to being the ancient settlers but not the ancient inhabitants of the province. But they also set themselves apart from the British Quakers and other European settlers who were already in the process of overwhelming, assimilating, and (culturally) eliminating them. After initially assisting Penn's officers in the early years of the new colony, many embittered "ancient Swedes" also turned against the proprietary government that they blamed for their troubles. In order to resist and survive—the key tools of the native in the binary native-settler structure—they had to open up and claim a special space for themselves within the settler category in order to make clear which side of the line they fell.

Here it may be useful to return to Mamdani, who argues in his book Neither Settler nor Native (2020), that in both the United States and South Africa, settlers were not defined by "the color of their skin" or "by language, culture, religion, gender, or socioeconomic status . . . nor by the length of residency, immigration status, or even citizenship status." Rather, what "defined the settler was the law to which she was subject"—the "civil law" of settlers versus the "customary law" of natives (Mamdani 2020, 145-46). The claim to be an "ancient settler" could mean many things, but in practice it was a dual claim to law and land. In an Anglo-American legal system based on precedence as well as precedents, to be recognized as the first rightful possessors of (native) land under Mamdani's so-called



"civil law" was an important status to have. They may have lacked the power to assert their claims, but they could claim the authority to have the state recognize those claims and to treat them with the respect—and give them the justice—that they were due under the law. To the extent that they were successful it was because, of course, that the law and and the state that they were appealing to also depended on those originary acts of dispossession in order to justify themselves. "Native" claimants, by contrast, often had to depend on treaty negotiations, not the courts—international law instead of civil law—and frequently found themselves (and still find themselves) systematically dispossessed as a result.

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Plantations in the Peatlands? Domestic Colonization and Settlement in the Nineteenth-Century Dutch North

Maarten Zwiers

A series of settlements in the Northeast of the Netherlands carry the epithet "colonial," for example the colonies founded by the Society of Benevolence in the provinces of Drenthe and Overijssel and the Peat Colonies (Veenkoloniën) along the provincial border between Drenthe and Groningen. To what extent can we identify (settler) colonial frames in the formation of these communities? Some settler colonial aspects appear to be present in the sense that *terra nullius* or "empty" land (in this case swampland) was occupied and cleared for cultivation. Patrick Wolfe's claim that "the colonizer came to stay—invasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe 2006, 388) is less clearly visible in the Colonies of Benevolence, however. The underlying idea of Society colonies like Veenhuizen was the education and eventual reintegration of colonists back into society as virtuous citizens. The Peat Colonies served as a Dutch Frontier of sorts – newspapers from the 1850s described Drenthe as "Nederlandsch Californië" – where adventurous individuals and cash-rich corporations could make a quick buck. Large-scale agriculture and persistent poverty nowadays characterize society in the Peat Colonies (Meij, Haartsen, and Meijering 2020, 227). Combined, the Colonies of Benevolence (in particular Veenhuizen) and the Peat Colonies seemingly followed the extractive logic of the plantation with regard to labor, land, and natural resources. Did connections exist between these specific forms of settlement in the North of the Netherlands and plantation templates in other parts of the world, for instance Asia and the Americas? Besides investigating such interrelations, this essay also suggests a more global perspective to study the history of settlement and extraction in the Dutch North.

As a (settler) colonial institution and outpost, the Plantation stood in direct opposition to the Swamp. While plantations represented cultivation (both in an agricultural and a social sense, with the planter elite embodying aristocratic elan), orderliness, and productivity, swamps constituted wastelands that needed to be brought under human control to make them useful. Geographer Morgan Vickers designates the framing of marshy areas as abject spaces "swampification," which signifies the "process whereby governments, corporations, and the press socially (re)invented swamplands as uninhabitable spaces of death and disease to justify their destruction" (Vickers 2023, 1675). When Europeans began colonization efforts in Asia and the Americas, the plantation became an important settlement format to occupy new territories. After the North American colonies won independence from England, the frontier experience soon manifested itself as a principal state formation instrument and eventually a

How to cite: M. Zwiers, 'Plantations in the Peatlands? Domestic Colonization and Settlement in the Nineteenth-Century Dutch North', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Zwiers



founding narrative for the United States. As historian Frederick Jackson Turner argued in his famous 1893 lecture "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," the frontier was a quintessential American affair that shaped the national character in terms of democratic government, opportunity, and individualism (Turner 1893). Together with the concept of Manifest Destiny – the idea that the United States has a divine mission to settle the North American continent in the name of progress and liberty – the Frontier Myth was central to the idea of American exceptionalism: a benevolent country committed to the expansion of equality and freedom.

These positive stories about the uniqueness of American expansionism hid the brutal realities of the settler colonial project in the United States, for instance the violent displacement of Native American peoples and the central role of the plantation (as an agricultural business and a socioeconomic model) in the settlement of North America. The so-called cotton frontier spread westward in the southeastern parts of the North American continent during the early nineteenth century, leading to the establishment of Deep South slave states like Mississippi (1817) and Alabama (1819). Although the Plantation Myth, much like the Frontier Myth, emphasized benevolence (the gentility of the planter class and the organic work relations between master and enslaved), the actuality of the plantation labor regime was in fact much less benign. It was a system based on brute force and the ruthless exploitation of enslaved laborers and the environment alike (Johnson 2013; Rothman 2005). Old-growth forests were cut down to make room for plantation farming. "There were oaks and cypresses, sweet gum and leafy cottonwood, persimmon and pecan, walnut, and maple. Cane grew to great heights to make an impenetrable jungle. Vines and creepers laced and interlaced in intricate tangle. Here was an animal's paradise of bear, deer, opossum, raccoon, rabbit, squirrel, panther, and mink," author David Cohn reflected on the Mississippi Delta's state of nature before the planters came. But that all began to change once they heard about the area's farming opportunities. "Rumors of the fertility of the soil of the Delta, then called 'the swamps,' began to drift back to Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and South Carolina," Cohn explained. "Planters made inquiries about this virgin land inhabited by only a few Indians, fugitives from justice, and wild animals. Then they purchased huge tracts and came with armies of slaves to clear the ground and open plantations along the rivers and on the creeks" (Cohn 1935). Cohn described the Delta – his home region – as *terra nullius* subsequently settled and cultivated by planters through enslaved labour.

Despite the claim that the frontier was a uniquely North American (or more specifically, U.S.) experience, in other colonized spaces plantations similarly functioned as frontier outposts destined to cultivate land and (indigenous) people. An example is the Dutch East Indies, where colonial officer Johannes van den Bosch purchased the plantation Soedimara on western Java in the early nineteenth century. Like Cohn, Van den Bosch characterized the land surrounding his new farm as an empty

wildland that he brought under control through cultivation. In a similar vein, he "taught" local people to perform agricultural work, because all they did was "waste their time" (Sens 2019, 86). Van den Bosch used both free and enslaved labor for rice production on his plantation. In 1810, he returned to the Netherlands. After being captured by the British on his journey home and spending two years in England as a prisoner of war, he finally arrived in the Netherlands in 1813, where he fought against the French occupation forces on behalf of the provisional Dutch government. After Napoleon's defeat in 1815, Van den Bosch continued his military work for the newly established Kingdom of the Netherlands until 1818, when he founded the Society of Benevolence. The objective of this organization was to come up with a proper solution for the immense and widespread poverty problem the Netherlands was dealing with after the Napoleonic era.

The philosophy behind the Society appeared to be quite simple: transport the urban poor to the countryside and teach them agricultural skills there so they eventually would be able to take care of themselves (De Clercq 2018, 16-18). The idea of the industrious, land-tilling farmer as the epitome of virtuous citizenship was of course not new, nor was it limited to the Netherlands – or Europe, for that matter. "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens," American planter-politician Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1785. "They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds" (Jefferson 1785). Such thoughts already motivated Van den Bosch during his time as a colonial agent and planter in the East Indies and he brought those experiences with him when he started the Society of Benevolence. Van den Bosch chose the province of Drenthe as the starting point for his agricultural colonies. Nineteenth-century writers described Drenthe as a boggy wasteland, inhabited only by heather, moss, snails, water insects and swamp birds, a solitary hare, a small number of shepherds (if the soil was not too miry for grazing sheep), and a few hunters (Van der Woud 1998, 213). For Van den Bosch, the remote hinterlands of Drenthe were the ideal location for his civilizing mission. Through the swampification of these hinterlands, they were rendered as "uninhabitable spaces of death and disease" (to use the words of Vickers) ready for destruction through the transformation into farmland. The Colonies of Benevolence thus constituted a dual cultivation effort: "useless" poor would be turned into virtuous citizens by making them turn "useless" swamps into productive fields.

Anthropologist Albert Schrauwers points out how Van den Bosch applied his plantation knowledge in the design and implementation of the Colonies of Benevolence. On Soedimara, he (or better, the people who worked for him) had successfully drained swampy land through the construction of a canal, turning wetland into profitable wet-rice fields. As the antithesis of swamp ecosystems, the plantation model of agriculture, based on coerced labor, served as the blueprint for the Colonies of Benevolence (Schrauwers 2020, 358-359). The architecture of colony towns like Frederiksoord and

Veenhuizen follows typical plantation layouts, with straight lines and open fields that brought a sense of order to the landscape and enabled surveillance of the labor force. The domestic colonies of the Society of Benevolence thus constitute a manifestation of the "imperial boomerang" Michel Foucault wrote about. Europeans implemented their models (like plantation farming) in the colonies, but these templates sometimes traveled back to Europe, as was the case with Van den Bosch's settlements in the Drenthe wilderness. "A whole series of colonial models was brought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonization, or an internal colonialism, on itself," according to Foucault (qtd. in Graham 2013).

The Colonies of Benevolence are located in the western parts of Drenthe. In the east of the province, on the border with neighboring Groningen, lie the Peat Colonies (Veenkoloniën in Dutch). Although they share the moniker "colonial" with the Society towns, their purpose was rather different. Instead of Van den Bosch's civilizing mission, the Peat Colonies' primary purpose was moneymaking. As the name already indicates, the Peat Colonies were rich in peat, an important source of fuel until the early twentieth century. Before the peat cutters arrived, the area was a rugged wetland named the Bourtange Moor. Starting in the 1600s, peat cutting operations slowly moved diagonally in a southeastern direction, toward the German border. Large groups of laborers from different parts of the transnational region and the country dug canals to drain the swamp and extract the peat, which was then transported to the big cities in the western Netherlands. The drained moor became farmland. Large-scale agriculture nowadays dominates the plantation-like landscape, with big farms, vast fields, and straight roads and canals – an orderly environment that stands in stark contrast to the swamp it once was. Not much is left of the Bourtange Moor. Bargerveen Nature Reserve is one of the few small patches of wetland that survived the colonization efforts by the peat-cutting business.

During the 1850s, provincial government officials and newspapers in Drenthe regularly employed American frontier rhetoric to describe the economic opportunities the Bourtange Moor offered, echoing settler colonial narratives about journeying to the Promised Land (Veracini 2024, 114). Politicians and journalists alike spoke and wrote about "Drenthe's California," making comparisons with the goldrush that was happening in the United States around the same time. They thought peat reservoirs worth millions of guilders were waiting to be dug up, providing land and a solid income to thousands of settlers. In 1868, reporter Harm Boon from the provincial capital of Assen gave his prediction for the future of the Peat Colonies: the rise of a major industrial metropolis comparable to the manufacturing towns in England, with factories, tall chimneys, the overwhelming noise of steam-driven machines, and streets lit by gas lanterns. Besides such visions of modernity, the treasure of the moorlands was also depicted in gendered terms. The regional newspaper *Provinciaal Drentsche en*

Asser Courant of 9 July 1853 for instance labeled the moor a "Veenbruid" or Fenland Bride, a virgin territory ready to be penetrated in order to reap its benefits (Visscher 2001).

Although similarities exist between colonial settlement patterns outside the Netherlands and the examples discussed above, obvious differences should not be ignored. An important distinction between settler colonies such as the United States and Australia and domestic colonial projects in the Dutch North is that large-scale elimination of (specifically racialized) native populations did not occur within the Netherlands. If we take a multispecies perspective, however, a different set of eliminatory practices becomes visible. Multispecies scholars want to move away from human-centered approaches and in doing so, intend to reframe "political questions: how do colonialism, capitalism, and their associated unequal power relations play out within a broader web of life?" (Van Doren, Kirksey, and Münster 2016, 3). From the sixteenth century onward, large-scale peat cutting almost completely erased the Bourtange Moor, a unique and expansive wetland ecosystem that took thousands of years to form – it once stretched for three thousand square kilometers, while Bargerveen totals a mere twenty square kilometers today.

In *Settler Ecologies*, Charis Enns and Brock Bersaglio examine the impact of settler colonialism on ecological relations in Kenya. Their objective is to demonstrate "how both of the defining characteristics of settler colonialism… – its logic of elimination and its endurance – are extended through the more-than-human world, resulting in the ongoing erasure and replacement of existing ecological relations with those of use and value to settler colonialism" (Enns and Bersaglio 2024, 13). What is the added value of such a multispecies approach to settler colonial studies, in particular related to the study of domestic colonization in the Dutch North, and which pitfalls loom by taking such an approach? In a critical discussion of the Plantationocene, a concept that emphasizes the massive impact of large-scale, plantation-like farming on issues such as global warming, species extinction, and climate change, geographer Janae Davis and her colleagues warned for a "flattened multispecies ontology – where difference between and among forms of life is obscured." On the basis of such an ontology, "multispecies assemblages of 'plants, animals, microbes, and people…' are flattened and simply appear as cogs in the wheels of capitalist destruction" (Davis et al 2019, 5). Davis and her co-authors are primarily concerned that understanding the Plantationocene through a multispecies lens obscures the racial politics that dictates a significant part of plantation life: "an interest in ecological ethics must not overshadow attention to the dynamics of power (racial, gender, sexual, or otherwise)," they write (Davis et al 2019, 10).

Without neglecting critical distinctions between plantation agriculture in the (former) colonies and its boomerang effects in Europe, it is hard to deny how internal colonialism had a devastating effect on the other-than-human world. In her non-fiction work *Fen, Bog & Swamp*, novelist Annie Proulx

exposes the systemic destruction of wetlands in the name of progress. “Today as the climate crisis begins to bite and the swelling numbers of the most populous mammal on the planet – 7.8 billion people – continues to grow some recognize that it is our ever-expanding human works and vast mechanized agriculture that have flattened the wilderness and introduce us to ever-new micro-organisms, while in the last fifty years more than half of the bird, mammal and amphibian populations have dwindled into memory or teeter on the edge of the extinction cliff,” Proulx writes (Proulx 2022, 15) Such eliminatory practices operate on a continuum of histories between external and domestic colonialism. Political scientist Barbara Arneil deconstructs the supposed binary between internal colonization and (settler) colonialism overseas. She sees both forms of colonization as “*common* nodes within **transnational colonial networks**” and domestic colonies as “sites constituted by the **intersection of different colonialism(s)**, including… settler and/or radical colonialism” (Arneil 2017, 222). Globally operating models, partly springing from (settler) colonialism, inspired resource extraction and settlement in specific zones of the northern Netherlands. A plantation mindset and a frontier mentality led to the creation of outposts to bring the swampy wilderness of the Dutch North under human control.

Acknowledgments: This essay emerged from “Race Land: The Ecology of Segregation,” a multi-year research project that has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 891936.

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Contested 'Modernities', Unaccepted Intermediaries? In Between-men in Settler Colonial Settings from the Levant

Karène Sanchez Summerer

From the very outset of settler colonialism, intermediaries played a crucial yet contested role, navigating between colonial powers, local societies, and transnational networks. In the early 20th century Levant, certain individuals (primarily men from non-majority population groups, and more rarely women) held unique linguistic and cultural resources that allowed them to mediate between imperial structures and local communities. While deeply rooted in their own societies, these intermediaries cultivated perspectives that extended beyond their immediate surroundings, enabling them to function as essential brokers in proto-national movements, colonial governance, trade, education, and diplomacy.

Mediation occurred not only across the Mediterranean but also within these societies themselves, (at times within a very same religious institution) shaping interactions between various social, religious, and political groups. These intermediaries, or 'in-between figures,' (Heyberger & Verdeil 2009) straddled multiple worlds, facilitating negotiations, adapting ideas, and often challenging rigid colonial binaries. Despite their indispensable role, they remained ambiguous and, at times, unaccepted, as both colonial authorities and (proto)nationalist movements viewed them with suspicion, questioning their loyalties and allegiances.

How to define this/ these group(s) of 'intermediaries', its delimitations and its (un)porous boundaries in a (settler) colonial setting? What were their multifaceted role in the settler colonial structures and their role in shaping, challenging, transforming these structures? To what extent were they essential at a macro, miso and micro levels? What were the points of contact/ connections/ interactions/ impact in the settlers' homeland?

Adopting a micro-historical approach, this short study does not answer these broader questions but examines points of contact, networks, and power dynamics that shaped the role of intermediaries in the colonial Levant settings (i.e. here the British and French Mandates Levant, 1918-1948). Focusing on two atypical figures of brokers, it explores how these figures functioned within and against colonial institutions, shedding light on broader questions of agency, contested modernities, and the limits of colonial control. The discussion focuses on two case studies from Ottoman and Mandate Palestine (1900–1937), illustrating how these brokers navigated between different socio-political spheres and how their presence complicates traditional narratives of settler colonialism and indigenous resistance.

How to cite: K. Sanchez Summerer, 'Contested 'Modernities', Unaccepted Intermediaries? In Between-men in Settler Colonial Settings from the Levant', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/SanchezSummerer



This short analysis intends to contribute to the historiographical debate on settler colonialism by addressing some of its limitations in acknowledging intermediaries, the complex role of these mediators who shaped, to a certain extent, colonial rule and nationalist movements. Yet it is necessary to integrate more intermediary figures into the study of colonial structures to better understand the fluidity of power, identity, and cultural exchanges that took place in the early 20th century Levant.

The Structural Role of Intermediaries in the Levant's Colonial Context and the 'In-Between' Problem in Settler Colonial Narratives

Settler colonial theory has traditionally emphasized the binary opposition between settlers and indigenous populations, focusing on the logic of elimination and the structural domination of settler regimes (Wolfe, 2006). However, this framework often overlooked the role of intermediaries, individuals who navigated the complex political, economic, and cultural landscapes of these societies, mediating between colonial authorities, local communities, and transnational networks (Lawrance, Osborn, & Roberts, 2015). These intermediaries (such as merchants, translators, educators, and bureaucrats) were both essential and contested figures in colonial governance, contributing to the functioning of settler states while often being perceived as unreliable or suspect by both colonizers and indigenous populations (Ben-Bassat & Büssow, 2011; Eldar, 2018). Their presence challenges the rigid categories of settler vs. native, revealing a more nuanced colonial landscape where power was diffused through layered and shifting allegiances (Schayegh, 2013; Khalidi, 2006).

Recent scholarship has begun to address this gap by examining the agency of intermediaries in shaping colonial rule and nationalist movements. Figures like Albert Antebi and Niqula Khoury (Sanchez Summerer, 2022; Irving, Nassif, & Sanchez Summerer, 2022) exemplify how local actors could leverage their positions to negotiate between empire and community in Ottoman Great Syria, yet their contributions have been largely sidelined. The rigid application of settler colonial structures theory to the Levant context often fails to account for the persistence of intercommunal ties, economic entanglements, and cultural brokerage, which were central to the experiences of these intermediaries (Campos, 2011; Evri, 2019; Smith, 2021). Additionally, the legal and administrative spaces occupied by intermediaries, whether within Mandate bureaucracies, educational institutions, or trade networks, complicate simplistic notions of colonial domination and indigenous resistance (Elkins & Pedersen, 2005; Cavanagh & Veracini, 2017).

By incorporating intermediaries into the analysis, we gain a more dynamic understanding of colonial governance, one that accounts for fluid identities, contested modernities, and alternative forms of resistance and collaboration (for ex. Tamari, 2004; Wallach, 2017, and the 'Arab Ashkenazi project',

forthcoming; Sanchez Summerer 2022). Exploring how intermediaries functioned as agents of cultural transmission, political negotiation, and economic transformation in settler colonial settings across the Middle East (Vilmain, 2022; Fishman, 2021, for ex.) and beyond, allows us to understand the multifaceted perceived loyalty vs. real agency.

Intermediaries indeed often had their own agendas, using their position not just for colonial administration but also for self-advancement and communal negotiation. Their positions were often unstable, often subject to colonial backlash, resentment of their own communities, or shifts in power structures.

Albert Antebi and Niqula Khoury, Arab Jew and Orthodox Arab Intermediaries?

Albert Abraham Antebi (Ibrahim Entaibi in Arabic in some sources) was animated by the desire to '*régénérer les Orientaux par les Orientaux*' (regenerating Orientals/ Easterners by Orientals/ Easterners themselves) and 'strengthen Mediterranean resistance' to a German model in the Levant. Originally from the Jewish community of Damascus, director of the AIU (Alliance Israélite Universelle) vocational school in Jerusalem from 1896 until 1913, vice-president of the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce, Antebi was also a community leader in Ottoman Jerusalem, an engineer, the representative of the Jewish Colonisation Association (ICA) from 1899 to 1913, land buyer for Baron Edmond de Rothschild and for the Lovers of Zion (founded in Russia in the 1880s to encourage emigration to Palestine), advisor to Cemal Pasha from early 1915 to October 1916, friend of Meir Dizengoff (founder and first mayor of Tel Aviv) and of Said Effendi al-Husayni (mayor of Jerusalem 1902–6 and deputy to the Ottoman Parliament), godfather of Amin el Husayni (the later Haj Amin), 'liberator' of David Ben Gurion and Isaac Ben Zvi, soldier of Mustafa Kemal and dragoman of the French embassy in Constantinople.

Analysing the imperial Ottoman and the British, French and German colonial structures via the complex experiences of Albert Antebi offers a glimpse into the porous boundaries of cultural identification, the role of some of these intermediaries in Ottoman/ early Mandate Palestine. His enormous personal correspondence and the AIU archives help tracing and questioning the imperial and proto-national policies, the French paradigm through which he continued to perceive the local and transnational situation of Palestine and to examine his complex positioning towards the proto-national scenes in Ottoman and British Mandate Palestine. They highlight the ways in which Antebi saw the entangled relations within which he existed in Palestine in the first two decades of the twentieth century: through Franco-German national and cultural competition in the region; the contest between cultural



and political or 'Oriental' and European schools of Zionist thought; and economic-cultural versus political-national models of Jewish integration into the wider society of the Ottoman Levant.

In a period when identifications were fluid and loyalties sometimes overlapping, the figure of Antebi lies between exclusive identification modes (for example, religious groups) and inclusive ones (Ottomanism or local urban identities like Jerusalemite). This is rendered even more complex by his positioning within different groups, as he was never fully integrated into either the governing AIU elite from France or the Sephardic elites in Jerusalem.

Antebi's colonising activities are incomprehensible without recalling that the First Aliyah was partially influenced by French Jews. Albert Antebi was an expert at the crossroads of the two legal orders of Ottoman Jerusalem (the reformed Ottoman law of the Tanzimat period and Capitulations law). As an expert in Ottoman land law, he became an indispensable interlocutor for reform-minded Ottoman officials and a skilful practitioner in the provincial institutions. He also became an essential intermediary for the French consuls in Jerusalem, an expert on the status of consular protection in the field of Jewish institutions and individuals.

From his correspondence with the AIU, a trans-community of sociability between Ottoman Jerusalem elites appears: the Arab Muslim aristocracy of Jerusalem seems to have had no objection to sending their children to Alliance schools, and Jewish notables did the same with the Christian missionary schools. Yet, after 1913, more rigid lines were drawn between certain affiliations and Antebi became an unwanted figure to many in the Jerusalem landscape.

The second case study is of an Arab orthodox priest from a very humble family from Ottoman Palestine. In the summer of 1937, in the midst of the Palestinian uprising against British rule, the possibility of partitioning Palestine between Jews and Arabs shifted from a marginal proposal to a very real prospect. After the Peel Commission report that year, the League of Nations and its Mandates Commission debated the notion of partition at the former's Geneva headquarters. The Arab Palestinian nationalist movement dispatched a number of delegates to Switzerland, amongst them the Greek Orthodox priest, educator and campaigner Niqula Khoury.

Khoury's memoirs, written in the early 1950s but long ignored in an archive in Beirut, depict a Palestinian clergyman, educator and nationalist and offer a personal perspective on the regional impacts of the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the Palestinian struggle for self-determination under British colonialism and political Zionism. As a priest of the Orthodox Church (as well as the son and grandson of Orthodox priests), Khoury was a high-profile and energetic agitator against the domination of the Orthodox Church in Palestine by the Greek hierarchy, a movement rooted in the nineteenth century and in the Nahda (often referred to as the 'Arab renaissance'), positioning Christian Orthodox communities within Arab nationalism. The manuscript itself was apparently written in Lebanon in the 1950s or the



early 1960s, shortly before Niqula Khoury's death in 1964. We thus do not have explicit details of Khoury's 'autobiographical pact' (Lejeune & Elger and Köse, 2010), the mutual understanding with his putative reader of the nature of the story he would tell and their relationship to his self-presentation. But almost forty years earlier, Niqula Khoury and his cousin Shehadeh had published a history of the Orthodox Church in Palestine which became an important document in the battle of representations and narratives within the greater war for control of the Greek Orthodox Church and its resources in the region. He was thus well aware of the potential value of a written account and its impact on wider discourse.

Khoury was also deeply opposed to splitting the territory of Palestine between Jews and Arabs. As he travelled across the Balkans, he visited senior members of the Orthodox churches in Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria to ask them for support in Geneva, during the League of Nations debates. The details of his trip highlight the links and contestations within and across the Orthodox world and going beyond Greece and Russia as the main Orthodox state actors. His account of the Geneva conference itself is also a rare window on Palestinian participation in the international negotiations whose outcomes were imposed on the Palestinian people in a disastrous form. The diplomatic means he used to attract support and challenge the plans of a Great Power via alternative networks of power and loyalty, shed light on the ideas and strategies that the Palestinian nationalist movement was utilizing at the time (see extract below, at the end of this short article).

Figures like Albert Antebi and Niqula Khoury exemplify how Levantine intermediaries negotiated the tensions inherent to the colonial settings, using their linguistic, social, and political capital to bridge the gap between Ottoman authorities, British colonial powers, and local communities. They served as cultural translators, educators, and to some extent record keepers, 'filtering' colonial policies for local communities while simultaneously influencing how colonial authorities understood the region. However, this process was fraught with tension. While Khoury seems to have reinforced colonial stereotypes (sometimes for self-preservation or career advancement), Antebi actively shaped alternative narratives, resisting colonial interpretations of governance. Some of the challenges they faced are valid for the settler colonial structures context: at times accused of distorting information or being mere extensions of some of the colonial interests, to colonial rulers, they appeared as 'too indigenous', too embedded in local networks to be fully trusted. To their own communities, they were viewed by some with scepticism or even resentment for their proximity to colonial power structures. This double alienation highlights the precarious nature of their roles, while their knowledge and expertise were valuable, they remained vulnerable to political shifts and ideological battles over cultural and national identification.

Intermediaries also reveal the limits of settler colonial control. British and French Mandate authorities struggled to manage figures who did not fit neatly into clear categories, as these intermediaries often navigated multiple allegiances and complex social positions. Many of them did not simply enforce colonial rule but also challenged it from within, who contributed to nationalist thought and cultural resistance. Some participated in nationalist movements while still holding administrative or diplomatic roles within Mandate structures.

Moreover, modernity/ies in the colonial Levant was deeply contested, and intermediaries were at the centre of these debates. Their efforts to promote hybrid forms (for ex. for urban planning, education, and legal reforms) were frequently delegitimized. Their agency and their role in shaping alternative, locally grounded visions of modernity/ies, that did not conform to either colonial or nationalist orthodoxies, their fluid loyalties of intermediaries allow for a more nuanced understanding of power relations in settler colonial structures and encourage us to rethink certain categories, to recognize the complex negotiations, compromises, and contestations that shaped colonial (and postcolonial) societies.

Conclusion

The role of intermediaries in settler colonial structures challenges conventional narratives that have long framed colonial encounters as a stark binary between settlers and indigenous populations. Intermediaries, a group far from being monolithic indeed, whether bureaucrats, educators, traders, or political actors, shaped and contested colonial governance, navigating the complex intersections between imperial administrations, local communities, and transnational networks. Their presence complicates the rigid structures of colonial rules, revealing how power was negotiated. While often perceived as ambiguous or suspect, these figures were pivotal agents of cultural transmission, economic exchange, and political brokerage, adapting and redefining their positions based on shifting colonial and nationalist dynamics.

Their experiences offer valuable insights into how colonial and indigenous actors coexisted, collaborated, and clashed, shaping the development of modern nation-states and identity formations. The study of intermediaries invites us to move beyond static categorizations, recognizing the fluidity of power and the agency of individuals who operated within, between, and beyond colonial frameworks. By applying micro-historical approaches and transregional perspectives, we can uncover the nuanced ways in which intermediaries facilitated, contested, and even subverted colonial agendas, the porous nature of colonial boundaries, where collaboration, adaptation, and opposition coexisted. They enrich our understanding of the complex human landscapes that characterized colonial rule and the struggles

over governance, identification, and cultural heritage. Uncovering these neglected figures is a necessary step in reclaiming the agency of those who operated in the interstices of empires and settler colonial structures.

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A Bright Future for Settler Colonialism? Fantasies on the Colonisation of Outer Space in a Historical Perspective.

Clemens Six

13 October 2024 was a decisive moment in the history of astronautics. On that day, SpaceX, Elon Musk's private space agency, launched a rocket into earth orbit and, for the first time ever, succeeded in redirecting the booster rocket back to the launching station. The spacecraft called Starship and its carrier system, Super Heavy, are a "fully reusable transportation system designed to carry both crew and cargo" to four destinations: a space station, earth orbit, the Moon, and, finally, Mars. The ultimate goal of these space travels is to make "life multiplanetary" (SpaceX homepage). Rocket reusability is a key technology not only to ferry scientific equipment, supplies, and humans to the Moon, to Mars and beyond but also to make the idea of outer space settlement easier to realise. The enthusiasm about this achievement was thus understandable. Former Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield, reflecting the sentiment of many, saw in it "an enormous step forward in human capability", a step that made him "even more excited for our collective future" (The Guardian 2024). Three months later, President Trump announced in his inaugural speech that planting the American flag on Mars will help to pursue his nation's "manifest destiny", a term originating from white supremacist thinking in the 19th-century United States (Gómez 2018).

It remains to be seen how collective or national this future in space will indeed be or, probably more realistic from today's point of view, whether space travel will remain a form of elitist escapism in the foreseeable future (Rushkoff 2023). In any case, fantasies around human settlement in space have a long and diverse history both in science and in literature. Although the current enthusiasm about new forms of space travel insinuates an altogether new era of outer space discovery leading beyond human history as we know it, the terms space colonisation and space settlement indicate an entanglement of contemporary space-related fantasies with the troubled history of modern (European) empires. If nothing else, this vocabulary seems to suggest ideological and practical continuities of such imperial patterns in recent approaches to the human conquest of outer space.

Interestingly, some scholars of a science of human space settlement are aware of such (possible) continuities but reject any sort of negative associations of space endeavours with colonisation and (violence-prone) settlement "as these other sites (in outer space) are uninhabited by people" (Smith 2019, 6). On similar lines, they criticise the term colonisation in this context because it would focus on ideology and imply policies of dominance and repression towards indigenous communities unknown in outer space (Haqq-Misra 2023, 14-15).

How to cite: C. Six, 'A Bright Future for Settler Colonialism? Fantasies on the Colonisation of Outer Space in a Historical Perspective', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Six

In what follows, I develop the exact opposite argument. Fantasies around outer space expansion and settlement are not only a continuation of settler colonial tropes but, ultimately, their historical completion in two respects: They promise absolute sovereignty that communities aimed for before but never achieved; and, in the long run, they envision the foundation of a new civilisation not only in cultural but also evolutionary terms. The claim that space settlement is not a form of settler colonialism because there are no indigenous communities in outer space to be massacred to achieve control over land confuses settler colonialism's means with its end. Historically, the relationship between the extinction of local communities and settler colonialism is multi-facetted and frequently indeed intrinsic (Wolfe 2006; Mamdani 2020). But it is important not to equate the elimination of people with the settlers' main objective, namely to occupy 'virgin' land in order to realise specific forms of social, economic, and political utopias in this supposedly empty space (Veracini 2021). In that sense, assimilating or even eliminating local communities is a strategy to achieve a goal, not the goal itself. To argue that there are no indigenous communities (yet) in outer space and therefore, comparisons with settler colonialism are inadequate, is beside the point of settler colonialism as a historical phenomenon.

Contemporary fantasies about outer space settlement are not only a continuation and adaptation of settler colonial tropes, they radicalise them and pursue their historical culmination in a utopian future that lies beyond the established coordinates of time and space. Four aspects illustrate this point. First, outer space is the most ideal and purest manifestation of virgin land, the core desire of settler colonial aspirations and longing. Settler colonialism literature discusses this central motive of empty land with the concept of *terra nullius*, originally a codification of mutual rights and obligations among European powers competing with each other in their overseas territories (Wolfe 2006, 391; Wolfe 1999, 26-27). In the current discussions around space expansionism, outer space manifests a *terra nullius* par excellence.

Second, the settlement beyond the Earth's orbit offers the long-term prospect of absolute sovereignty. This notion of sovereignty is not only a complete disentanglement from all earthly matters including the existing legal, political, and economic relations but also from the notion of human history as such. It creates the opportunity for an altogether different civilisation released from the confines and flaws of what humans have created so far on Earth.

Third, in outer space, the formation of an alternative social body surpasses the creation of a new social order and a new collective identity, as seen in historical forms of settler colonialism. Settlement in outer space envisions a new social body shaped by biological and psychological mutation, enabling space settlers to diverge from humanity and human history not only culturally but also evolutionary.



And finally, expansion into non-earthly space entices with the prospect of completing capitalism's deepest and most existential aspirations: unhindered and unlimited resource extraction and a truly endless accumulation of capital and wealth.

To make these observations more concrete, I discuss below in more detail three space settlement tropes as I found them in recent scientific and popular literature published in Western, particularly US-American academia.

Settler trope 1: externalising earthly problems

In the modern era, and possibly even earlier, settler colonialism was driven by externalisation dynamics through which societies and economies reallocated socio-economic problems to new territories and social contexts. Outmigration that facilitated the establishment of new settlements abroad was frequently fuelled by economic despair, different manifestations of social exclusion based on ethnicity, religion, or other forms of culture, and (forced) displacement in the context of violent conflict (Veracini 2021). Debates around human settlement in Earth orbit and in outer space take up this trope, radicalise it, and transform it from a historical-analytical argument into a justification for the expansion into outer space. Specific to our times, these debates contain a new layer of apocalyptic dystopia grounded in the expectations of ecology-induced civilisational collapse.

A first argument concerns the general risk for mankind living on one single planet with no escape to any other celestial body. As astronomic events such as a meteorite impact have already altered the history of the blue planet in profound ways, it appears almost as a "moral imperative" (Green 2019, 37) for humans to expand as quickly as possible beyond Earth. This imperative entails the moral principle that humankind must exist as otherwise morality itself would die together with the human species. Building on the influential writings of US-American planetary scientist Carl Sagan (1934-1996) and various forms of escapism into outer space formulated during the Cold War era (Vettese & Pendergrass 2022, 22-26), recent fantasies propagate the idea of "extra-terrestrial settlement" as the *only* way for humans to avoid extinction. These settlements are framed as "universal shelters" to re-establish civilization and secure the survival of humanity on a multiplanetary scale (Haqq-Misra et al 2022, 23).

Among the many scenarios that could potentially lead to human annihilation, ecological (self-)destruction stands out. Some observers remain vague in their speculations about environmental disasters and their catastrophic impact. They include 'natural' disasters harming economies on a large scale, bad management of available resources, over-dependency of societies on foreign resources, and a general lack of adaptation to changing ecological circumstances (Salotti 2015, 11). Others, though,



are more specific. In their view, self-inflicted ecological collapse on earth is not only a possibility of the coming decades, but a realistic, even unavoidable fate of the Earth System with devastating consequences for human civilisation (Tiwari 2001; Szocik et al 2020b). In a way, one could argue that these collapse scenarios provide science with the most compelling justification, even an imperative for outer space settlement.

Related to ecological collapse, some observers expect social collapse to happen on earth in the nearby future (Barker 2015). This would mean that, initiated by the breakdown of ecological systems and its far-reaching consequences for economic activities including food production, societies would lose their institutional and cultural complexities leading to an irreversible breakdown of adaptation capacity and large-scale violence. In this context, the urge to establish a new society and a new social order on, for example, Mars gains immediate urgency.

In the light of such horrific scenarios, scholars try to address further questions about people's possible motivations to emigrate from Earth. While some ask, in comparison to Australian colonisation, how voluntary space settlement will actually be (Szocik et al 2020a, 6), other commentators dream of a new social order that unifies people of diverse backgrounds, reinstates equality among individuals, and, ultimately, completes the 500-year history of frontier expansionism (Tutton 2017). Similar to the Georgia Colony (1732-1750), a colonial settlement in the US South, space settlement is supposed to become a "social experiment" creating "a perfect society" (Szocik et al 2020a, 6). American settlers framed the Georgian swamps and forests as a "paradise with all her virgin beauties" (Bartley 1990, Chapter One; also Stewart 2002), empty lands hostile to humans but full of riches to be conquered and, ultimately, converted into the homeland of a new, ordered, and pious society. While these tropes of social utopia have been a defining element of settler colonialism since ancient times, the diagnosis of a world-wide, ecology-induced social collapse as a justification for resettlement is new and it is specific to outer space fantasies in the Anthropocene, i.e., the cluster of ecological destructions caused by human activity that picked up speed and scope after 1945 and thus called by some historians the "great acceleration" (McNeill & Engelke 2016).

Settler trope 2: Towards a new civilisation (or: What is outer space anthropology?)

Settler colonial endeavours have always been a combination of two seemingly contradictory approaches: (violent) attempts to subordinate the new spaces to the political imaginations and socio-economic interests of the settlers; and adaptation efforts towards the new ecological, geographical, and economic contexts through a variety of civilisational techniques which the settlers brought with them and adjusted to the immediate requirements of their new surroundings.

Outer space anthropology is an interdisciplinary research field that can also be understood as adaptation science. Its purpose is to figure out how life beyond Earth's orbit can adjust itself to extremely hostile atmospheric and ecological circumstances in order to survive beyond the life-span of one single generation. This discussion concerns the biological, social, cultural, and psychological aspects of human existence. In other words, scientific speculations about outer space settlement can also be seen as contributions to an "adaptive evolution" (Smith 2019, 6) towards the multiplanetary existence and long-term survival of humanity. In that light, outer space fantasies radicalise settler colonial adaptation strategies towards a complete reinvention of the human species including its psychological and genetic setup. Under the circumstances of a relocation of life outside the established ecological settings on earth, social engineering matures into biological engineering. Consequently, the total production of space as an entirely new habitat for humans translates into the total (re)design of the human subject (Scharmen 2021). This would not simply be the dawn of a new era within human history but it would establish an altogether new notion of history.

It is not without irony that, on the one hand, scientific-intellectual circles around tech-billionaires speculate with admirable meticulousness about how to escape the many forms of apocalypse on earth, particularly in the form of an ecological-social collapse. At the same time, these tech-entrepreneurs and their companies contribute themselves significantly to this collapse (Oxfam 2023).

In terms of practical conduct, outer space settlement is confronted with a wide range of problems that make human existence beyond the earth a complex endeavour. Already towards the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, NASA drafted an "evolutionary approach" to expand humanity into the solar system starting from the low earth orbit (LEO) to the Moon, on to Mars and further expand from there into outer space (Fairchild & Roberts 1989). The main idea behind this evolutionary logic was to give humans the opportunity to gradually adjust their adaptation strategies, thereby optimise their adaptation capabilities, and, ultimately, reach a stage of outer space sovereignty that disconnects these new settlements more or less entirely from earth.

More recently, speculations on outer space settlement dream about an "autonomous civilisation rather than an extension of civilisation on Earth" and extend this vision towards "planetary statehood" as an assembly of equal planetary states bound together in a new setup of interplanetary relations and rules (Haqq-Misra 2023, Chapter 8, esp. 185-187). Strikingly, in these discussions such relations are usually framed as non-violent or even non-conflictual. Historical experience suggests otherwise, though. There seems to be plenty of potential for conflict, even outright war over precious resources and diverging economic interests.

In order to realise space settlement as a place where "people go to work, live, and, for those who wish, raise their kids" (Globus 2017, 2), momentous problems need to be overcome. This includes



complex technological infrastructure to facilitate food production (Puumala et al 2023, 5, Cannon and Britt 2019); erect living spaces subdivided into zones that correspond with the different elements of human existence comparable to how "early explorers" established their agriculture, manufacturing, and industry in their new settlements (Alamoudi et al 2022, 22-25); a closely monitored gender-ratio to keep reproduction in balance (Tiwari 2021); and a form of governance profoundly different from the political struggles on earth. Elon Musk, who, unlike Jeff Bezos, is not only concerned with more room for humans to prosper but centrally feels like a messiah to save mankind from extinction (Scharmen 2021, 191), imagines this outer space governmentality as "direct democracy" based on the two key elements of meritocracy and technocracy (Haqq-Misra et al 2022, 27-28). Bezos, on the other hand, does not expect any systemic alternatives to evolve in outer space but thinks of outer space settlement largely as a reflection of earthly political and economic relations. What both Bezos and Musk share, though, is a libertarian-conservative vision of outer space settlement (Weinersmith 2023) which reflects and exacerbates their current involvements in earthly relations to transform both the economy and increasingly also the state according to their corporate interests. What is more, these two personalities illustrate that utopian visions on new settlements in virgin spaces can also be fostered by elites rather than the settlers themselves, who frequently belonged to lower and middle classes.

A particularly fascinating, yet underacknowledged aspect of space colonisation is the psychology of long-distance space travel and a life in extremely cramped housing in an ecologically hostile environment. These psychological considerations are increasingly prominent in the literature suggesting that a settlement on Mars will also, probably even primarily, require the psychological-mental adaptation as a central feature of a new civilisation (Szocik et al 2020a, Szocik 2019, Szocik ed. 2019; Fairchild & Roberts 1989, 234). How such an adaptation can be achieved and which concrete measures can be undertaken to accelerate this process, is largely unclear. But there are two important ethical questions resulting from this problem: How can outer space entrepreneurs and settlers justify the psychological costs these endeavours will have, particularly during the initial phase of this expansionism? And, in the light of these costs, is such a kind of life away from earth worth living and for who? The dream of "permanent epistemic change" (Haqq-Misra 2016, 64) in individuals and communities includes an unknown and unaddressed psychological impact that questions the very ethics of any such utopia.

Settler trope 3: Capitalism's ultimate frontier

Space X's breakthrough in October 2024 in the deployment of a reusable booster rocket contains many different innovations important for space travel and space settlement. The most important one is to



reduce the transportation costs into space and make the space endeavour profitable by transforming the rocket business into something similar to the aircraft one (The Economist 2024). The commercialisation of space travel through space tourism (Globus 2017, 30) or the establishment of an outer space real estate market (Ibid, 13) are meant to cover the significant costs of transportation beyond earthly gravity. Once the travel is profitable, space expansionism is meant to open up "a new frontier of innovation" (James 2018a, 3), provide access to the riches of space mining including minerals from asteroids and planets, and establish "a new space resource economy" (Ibid, 6; see also Zubrin 1996, Globus 2010). Such an economy is based on virtually endless resource extraction and, by extension, capital accumulation. Scholars argue since quite some time that, together with primitive accumulation, settler colonialism was a key ingredient in the expansion of capital in the (early) modern era (Lloyd & Wolfe 2016) and settler colonies served as important destinations for surpluses (Harvey 2003, 119). Outer space fantasies perpetuate this economic pattern and update it from the past into the future.

Design experiments such as the "Mars Manufacturing Settlement" called "Leominster" drafted by scholars of Mars Foundation and Mars University in the United States tried to find out how a Mars settlement can be made sustainable in a comprehensive sense: food production, energy supply including methane fuel production and nuclear energy, water production and extraction, 3D print of furniture, the production of plastic etc. The main economic purpose assumed in this experiment was the exportation of fluids and manufacturing products such as spacecraft frames, trusses, antennas, rocket motors, and even food from Mars to Earth (Mackenzie et al 2021). For critics, such settler colonisation ideas "repeat the pattern of colonies on Earth both with regard to their relations with the home planet and with the indigenous inhabitants where they exist" (Tower Sargent 2010, 203-204). There is, however, maturing enthusiasm among scientists and entrepreneurs about what might be unlimited riches outside earth orbit. Although largely unsubstantiated by concrete data, these aspirations also begin to interest private banks such as Goldman Sachs and space-mining companies such as The Moon Express (James 2018b, 70, 77; Mukundan et al 2023).

Unsurprisingly, these fantasies are frequently combined with an urgent call for state authorities to take distance and leave these market forces to themselves in their strive for the commercial treasures of outer space. As the argument goes, government agencies have achieved little or no profits since the Apollo mission. The "new space companies" such as SpaceX or Blue Origin, by contrast, have much clearer strategic goals, overwhelming financial power, and, as a consequence, higher risk tolerance. Taken together, these qualities would alter space exploration towards higher investment and potentially soaring profitability (Utrilla and Welch 2017). In brief, earthly capitalism is currently opening up its ultimate and, as it seems, also its final frontier.



Conclusions

These three settler tropes illustrate that there are numerous parallels and continuities between contemporary ideas of space settlement and the earthly experience with settler colonialism. In that sense, settler colonialism as a structure finds its continuation and also completion in the fantasies of human transformation towards a new civilisation in outer space and the creation of a space resource economy on a multiplanetary scale. Outer space settlement charges the established settler colonialism tropes with an apocalyptic dimension that combines a diagnosis of socio-ecological collapse on earth with an unshakable belief in technological progress as a realistic and timely way out, at least for a small part of mankind. In its predominant character as an imaginary of financial and academic elites, however, climate change escapism is different from previous forms of settler colonialism which recruited strongly among lower and middle classes.

This reasoning is not without cynicism. Instead of supporting humanity to devote all its energy and resources to prevent collapse and self-destruction, it delivers lofty space fantasies ultimately based on the acceptance of mass starvation and mass death on earth. In doing so, it perpetuates the historical framing of nature as an object of human control and a source of extraction and exploitation that current debates around the Anthropocene and planetary history seek to overcome through a more integrated understanding of nature and culture. In that light, these “childish dreams” (Deudney 2020, 367) around settler colonialism in outer space are epistemically a conservative, even backward-looking utopia about the future of mankind.

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Roman Colonialism as Settler Colonialism? Potentialities and Problems

Evan Jewell

Settler colonialism, which this volume ambitiously, yet critically and rigorously interrogates as a framework for understanding different colonial phenomena across multiple temporalities, scales, and spatialities, represents a promising lens for understanding some of the processes, motivations, and results of Roman colonization. The "deep historical" approach which Pelgrom advocates for, and the questions which he poses at the outset of his contribution, are indeed large in scope, but they importantly do not shy away from pushing the envelope in terms of the frameworks we can bring to an undertheorized field of Roman history, not least from studies of later forms of colonialism. This is much needed in the field (advocated, for example, in Isayev, Jewell, Gizaw and Schenck 2023). Pelgrom's inversion of the perennial binary of Roman colonizer versus indigenous/migrant/refugee victim, through the example of Machiavelli's reframing of the Gallic invasions, might seem at first look to fall into the trap of "replacement theory", which dominates current discourses within the conservative politics of immigration. Yet it nonetheless forces us to consider anew how issues of agency, intent and the *en masse* movement of coherent—cultural, political, religious or otherwise—groups of people determine what was, or is now, designated by historians as a form of "invasion" or "colonization", or rather differently, as a "migration". When does movement from one place of habitation to another become something other than just (a) movement? Does that movement broach, or pass into another taxonomy, at that moment of a displacement, and an elimination, of another group in the process of seeking emplacement in a new space of habitation?

Indeed, Pelgrom's nuanced consideration of Veracini's framework of settler colonialism versus the more recognizable *longue durée* phenomenon of settler colonization opens the door to a new mode of analysis, which is extended and implemented in Daniels' contribution on the Caesarian colonies at the end of the first century BCE. Daniels' underlining of the non-colonial options which Romans could avail themselves of to administer territories, such as Pompey's synoecisms in the Greek urban centers of the east after the Mithradatic wars, offers a crucial counterpoint to our understanding of Roman colonialism as the dominant instrument of imperial expansion and control. Moreover, his discussion of how *provinciae* and *coloniae* can perhaps find legibility in the distinction between extractive "colonialism" and more eliminatory "settler colonialism" is enlightening and nuanced in its explication, even if we do need to draw distinctions between citizen and non-citizen actors, or "exploiting agents of empire" and his point that both *provinciae* and modern colonies "saw a class of private traders and

How to cite: E. Jewell, 'Roman Colonialism as Settler Colonialism? Potentialities and Problems', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Jewell



contractors that were indispensable for the exploitation of the provincia/colony." For we must ask, would a freedman, a freeborn Roman citizen, and an Italian (who was not necessarily a Roman citizen) all have the same extractive relationship to the *provincia* as that of the modern colonial actors and apparatus. Some consideration of colonial trading companies, such as the Dutch East India Company or British East India Company, as equivalents to, say, Roman and Italian *negotiatores* operating in Epirus or Delos, could offer fruitful insights.

Daniels' piece also offers an assessment of my own attempt to reorient our understanding of the motivations driving Roman colonization towards internal concerns—domestic politics and status-based struggles—especially in the Caesarian and Augustan phase of transmarine colonies. While I do concur in the belief that "the foundation of Roman *coloniae* at this time in the east … can be understood through their role in facilitating and stabilizing a regime change at the core of the empire", Daniels proposes that we need to arrive at a far more complicated view of elite solidarity on the issue of colonization as a means of social engineering. In particular, he argues that Caesar's motivations for the creation of a transmarine colonization scheme were not necessarily tied to, nor driven by, an elite consensus—and its concomitant discourses—that the *plebs urbana* needed to be "drained" from the city. And this point is well taken: not everyone had precisely the same reasons for displacing the *plebs urbana*. Cicero did, after all, oppose land redistribution schemes, such as that of Rullus' in 63 BCE in his *De lege agraria* orations, both before the *plebs* in a *contio*, and before the senate.

Even so, we should refrain from equating Caesar's programmes with those of the Gracchi—an approach long abandoned for its anachronism—and instead consider that Caesar could have his cake and eat it too: he could tap into his fellow elites' desire to displace the *plebs urbana* from the *urbs*, and equally serve his own agenda (populist, *popularis*, or otherwise). That "Caesar initiated a 'settler revolution' not to prevent a revolution at home, but to anchor his own" reads as a false dilemma, inasmuch as the two aims were not mutually exclusive, so long as they were not at odds with each other—and rarely did that ever occur. Moreover, it is unlikely that Caesar could ever rely upon the transmarine *coloniae* for true political support—not least cold, hard votes in the assemblies—when the journey to Rome to vote obviated this for most citizens from the get go (Jewell 2019: 28). And even the struggle between Caesar's colonists and Atticus (and his fellow cattle ranchers) in and around Buthrotum—cited as a case in point—speaks to Caesar's desire, at least as Cicero understood it and transmits it, to satisfy a broader elite disregard for the *plebs urbana* and where they ended up through the displacement mechanism of colonial foundations: so long as they were *overseas*, and thus, they were no longer *over here, in the city*, seems to be all that mattered as a point of fundamental agreement, not disagreement, between elites (senatorial and equestrian) at this time in Rome—Caesar included (Cic. Att. 16.16a.3 = SB 407A- July 4 or 5-: c*um autem mare transissent, curaturum se ut in alium*

agrum deducerentur; "once they [sc. the colonists] had gone overseas he would see to it that they were settled on some other land"). Where Daniels' analysis proves salutary is his insight that the aims of the average—often freedperson—colonist could come into conflict (sometimes physical, as at Buthrotum) with those of the Roman elites who had already settled in the provinces.

By the same token though, noting how it was the *plebs*, for instance, who requested the vengeance against the Aequi for their terrorization of Roman colonists, Pelgrom suggests that some of the impetus for Roman "elimination" campaigns came from the collective *plebs*, and not simply the "Roman state and the military". Here, some nuance could be lost in such an analysis, since Livy's (9.24) account only attributes to the *plebs* a desire for the safety of any Roman colonist, which drove their push to seek vengeance against the Aequi, while equally, the majority of the voting (propertied) *plebs* would have also constituted the men of age serving in the military (*iuventus*)—what the (propertied) *plebs* wanted, was in all likelihood synonymous with what the military wanted, outside of the imperatives of the senatorial class and its own agenda. Our understanding of the agency and intentions in such an episode are further muddied by the fact that it is Livy who transmits them, and again, that these may be inflected by the discourses surrounding colonization from the late republican debates over land redistribution and then Caesar's transmarine colonies (see Jewell 2019: 24 with n.125).

One other front, however, where settler colonialism might be brought into fruitful conversation with Roman colonization is the factor of environment, since many a Roman colony and New World colony failed due to environmental factors, from lack of water sources to malaria and yellow fever. Connected to this, too, was cultivation of racial differences between colonist and colonized, but also between metropole and colony, sometimes themselves based on racialized theories of disease and environment (see e.g. Nash 2006). Differential immunity and the erstwhile Black Swan of mosquito-borne viruses, such as yellow fever, which could influence, if not wholly determine, the outcomes in the arena of Caribbean colonial competition (see e.g. McNeill 2010), could just as easily have had an impact on the relative outcomes of Roman colonization ventures. In 186 BCE, the colonies of Buxentum and Sipontum were found to be abandoned, perhaps partially for environmental reasons, while at Salapia the colonists did in fact ask to move due to the pestilential nature of their site, just as Placentia and Cremona asked for supplementary colonists due to disease outbreaks ravaging their numbers; the sources also seem to link Liternum's issues with its marshes (Buxentum and Sipontum: Livy 39.23.3; Cic. *Leg. agr.* 2.71. *Pace* Salmon (1970: 99), opportunism from locals who sought Roman citizenship, cannot be the overriding reason for abandonment—every foundation had a healthy number of Roman citizens among it. Cf. Gualtieri and de Polignac (1991) on the lack of a shift of location for Buxentum towards the coast. Placentia and Cremona supplement in 190 due to disease: Livy, 37.46.10. Salapia: Vitruv. 1.4.12. with Sallares (2002: 264–66). Liternum: Val. Max. 5.3.2). Cosa suffered from lack of a

water source and, as ingenious as its water recycling and storage systems were, it was also likely hampered by the malarial nature of the Maremma region, just as its sister foundation, Paestum, also suffered from similar issues linked to the "diseased" environment (See Sallares (2002: 193, 197-8, 250); and now Glennie (2022: 44-8). On Paestum: Strabo, 5.4.13. On the Maremma: Pliny, Ep. 5.6.2). At another level, land reclamation projects, such as those in the Pontine marshes (Attema et al. 2024; Davies et al. 2023; Sevink 2023), should also be viewed similarly, within the matrices of settler colonialism, just as Zwiers does in this volume for the Dutch colonial landscape, and as Six does for the potential space colony and its hostile environment.

The colonial ground, so to speak, from questions of political agendas and social engineering to environmental factors, recast through the matrix of settler colonialism frameworks, seems to present a wealth of new opportunities for revisiting old questions and evidence for the study of Roman colonies anew, and this volume, not least the contributions of Pelgrom and Daniels, go a long way to setting the terms for future research and debate in this sphere.

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Processes and Relationships

Michael Oberg

I have been working in the field of Indigenous American history for a long time but have engaged with the concept of settler colonialism less readily than many of my peers. Initially I shared James H. Merrell's critique that confining settlers to colonists "makes European colonial thinking normative, denigrating and dismissing Native ways of ordering—and settling—the land," and "thereby rendering Indian territories *unsettled*, with all the errors of that default mode (as with *wilderness*)" (Merrell 2012, 473). As Jeremia Pelgrom and Clemens Six point out, moreover, settler colonialism as an approach tends "to overlook Indigenous agency and empowerment" (Pelgrom and Six, 2025).

The essays in *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* have forced me to engage with the literature in this field, then, in ways that I have not done before. Patrick Wolfe's "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" appeared in 2006, after I had been a professor for twelve years, after I had written three books, and probably after I became a good bit set in my ways (Wolfe 2006). Funny thing is that I now see the parallels between my first book, *Dominion and Civility*, and Wolfe's "Settler Colonialism," which he published seven years after my book appeared.

Like Wolfe, I hoped to understand and explain the nature of the encounter between Indigenous peoples and European newcomers. I argued that English "metropolitans," the promoters of Anglo-American empire, struggled to control the frontier population, which contended with Indigenous peoples for access to and control of finite frontier resources which they used in incompatible ways. Out of that incompatibility came violence over control of the land and harsh, racist assessments of Indigenous peoples and culture. In resolving these crises in New England and the Chesapeake, metropolitans at the imperial center and in provincial headquarters tended to adopt the violent and virulent racism of the frontier as their own. The violence quickly became genocidal. Virginia Company of London officials who, for instance, had claimed in 1609 that "it is not the nature of men, but the education of men which makes them barbarous and uncivill, and therefore change the education of men and you will see that their natures will be greatly rectified and corrected," by 1622, after the Powhatan Chiefdom launched a devastating attack on their colony, had thrown the Powhatans off the Ark and referred to the Indians as "errors of nature/of inhumane birth/ the very dregs, garbage, and spanne of the earth" (quoted in Oberg, 1999). Their "savagery," it seemed, was irredeemable.

How to cite: M. Oberg, 'Processes and Relationships', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Oberg

Settlers on the frontier wanted land, and they were willing to kill to obtain it. But even those metropolitans, who looked at Indigenous peoples and saw "sonnes of Adam, in whom there remain so many footsteps of God's image," believed that at best Indigenous peoples might become something else. They could become "civilized," and "Christianized," and serve the ends of an Anglo-American, Christian, New World Empire. In this sense, both the frontier and the metropolis looked forward, albeit in different ways, to "the elimination of the Native." The "imperialism" that I described was not all that different from Wolfe's "settler colonialism."

I see value in drawing comparisons, across time and space, in the efforts of other metropolitans to settle other frontiers. These comparisons, I know, can be instructive. The Romans who interested Jeremia Pelgrom (2025) for instance, spoke in terms that the two Richard Hakluyts, the greatest promoters of Elizabethan empire, would have well understood. Jitse Daniels (2025) pointed out that Roman officials in the Greek East were well aware of their weakness on this frontier, a reality English imperial administrators confronted and with which they would easily have empathized.

Nonetheless, I consider myself a historian of Indigenous America, and looking back on *Dominion and Civility,* I feel that I spent too much time talking about Europeans, and not enough about the Indigenous peoples with whom they interacted. We need to look at these encounters, and as we do so, we must free ourselves from teleological assumptions premised on the ultimate triumph of the newcomers. Perhaps settler colonialism might be viewed less as a process and more as a set of relationships that varied across time and space based on the Europeans involved and the Indigenous peoples brought together in this colonial encounter. Neither Natives nor newcomers were monoliths. Settlers seldom spoke with one voice, as both Jitse Daniels and Mark Thompson point out. And more than the Europeans who composed the accounts on which we rely, an enormous number of Indigenous communities with different interests approached the newcomers. This is the point I have tried to show in my work on the Roanoke Ventures late in the sixteenth century (Oberg 2020). It is vital to understand the multitude of voices, native and newcomer, brought together along a variety of frontiers. We must look more closely at the Indigenous side of the encounter, and the cacophony of voices present there. How, for instance, did Indigenous peoples view the colonial forces against which they found themselves arrayed? What plans did they develop and nurture for incorporating European newcomers into their conceptual universe? Indigenous people, acting on norms and values about interacting with outsiders and transforming them into kin that long predated the arrival of Europeans, brought much indeed to the colonial encounter, something easy to see even in the fumbling attempts of English imperial officials who, in their quest to obtain Iroquois land in what became New York, found themselves passing across the "council fire" strings and belts of "wampum" as they spoke to their Indigenous "brothers" of "drying eyes," "opening ears," and "unstopping throats," so that business could proceed (Oberg 2007a).



It is these relationships that interest me most. Focusing on these relationships allows us to see how Indigenous leaders like the seventeenth-century Mohegan Uncas used his knowledge and the power of the English to develop the Mohegans into a regional power. Uncas played as large a role in the formation of "colonial" New England as any of the Puritan "founding fathers" of the region. English explorers who arrived at Roanoke Island in 1585 came not as conquerors but as invited guests, settling where Algonquian wereoances on the Outer Banks placed them. The English at Roanoke could show great brutality. Their arrival brought significant disruption. But that their colonizing efforts failed owed less to their short-sightedness and bad luck than it did to the basic fact that Algonquian peoples on the Outer Banks no longer saw reason to tolerate their presence any longer (Oberg 2007b). And French Jesuits, who came to the center of the Iroquois League, Onondaga, in the middle of the 1600s may have thought that they were acting on opportunities opened by God's providence to save savage peoples. In reality, they were hostages, serving Onondaga purposes. When the priests finally figured this out, they made secret plans to escape. They built a boat in the one place they knew the Onondagas would never look: the church that no Onondaga attended (Oberg 2026).

When we talk about settler colonialism, then, we risk talking too much about Europeans, their ideas, and their institutions, and too little about Indigenous peoples who exercised considerable power in the colonial encounter. European dreams smashed continually into American realities in ways that the newcomers seldom anticipated. Europeans intruded into an environment in which Indigenous peoples had found ways to meet their material and cultural needs in emotionally, spiritually, and physically satisfying ways. They had, over centuries, developed means to maintain a critical balance, with their neighbors, among themselves, and with the spiritual forces that ordered their cosmos. They had developed ways of living and systems of belief that allowed them to survive and comprehend their world in all its complexity. They did not live in isolation. They interacted with other communities, fighting with some and living in peace with others. They had devised culturally satisfying means for interacting and dealing with strangers and rendering unfamiliar people familiar. When Europeans arrived they found themselves, at least at the outset, surprised to be operating in a world governed by Indigenous rules. Reading European accounts too uncritically and uncarefully, I believe, makes it nearly impossible to explain Indigenous persistence.

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Commentary to "Settler Colonialism as a Structure?"

Cyrus Schayegh

Building on the article "Settler Colonial Studies: A Historical Analysis" and on the ensuing exchange between this author and Ikuko Asaka, Antoinette Burton, and Sidney Lu in the journal Settler Colonial Studies (Schayegh 2024a and b; Lu 2024; Asaka 2024; Burton 2024) this commentary engages with the excellent interventions in the KNIR Dialogues Online issue "Settler Colonialism as a Structure?" to make a few basic inquiries.

Causes

Focusing on Ancient Rome, Jeremia Pelgrom's "The Ancient Roots of Settler Colonialism" and Jitse Daniels' "Caesar's World Turned Inside Out? Roman Provincial Colonisation and the 'Settler Revolution' of the First Century BCE" both address a question that is not central to most modern SCS studies: root causes. Both think these are not to be found in the to-be-settler-colonized areas themselves but, rather, in Rome; Romans were not pulled, but pushed out, into those areas. Both, too, argue these domestic causes were political—to Daniels, political-economic—in nature. However, in the case of Pelgrom the plebs played the central role, while Daniels argues the political root cause was intra-elite maneuvering (rather than the need to decrease popular pressures at home by sending people away, to settle elsewhere, an argument made by Lorenzo Veracini for the modern period, as Daniels notes).

Keeping in mind that an existential political issue in Europe and the Americas after the French revolution was mass demands for, elite fears about, and limits to popular political participation; and heeding the fact that certainly all modern Anglo settler colonies experienced bottom-up political emancipatory demands, leading to settler democracies, modern historians may be inspired by Pelgrom and Daniels' arguments to ask three questions. Where in modern Europe, and why, were "the masses" actively involved and interested in setting in motion settler colonial dynamics overseas? How did such—hypothetical—mass causes politically, economically, and culturally intersect with intra-elite disagreements about domestic politics and their overlap with overseas colonization? And what does it mean for our analysis that causes triggering settler dynamics (in Europe or elsewhere) did not only precede consequences but, rather, continued to operate long after the settler colonialisms' consequences, on land and natives, became palpable?

How to cite: C. Schayegh, 'Commentary to "Settler Colonialism as a Structure?"', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Schayegh

Means and/versus ends

In "A Bright Future for Settler Colonialism? Fantasies on the Colonisation of Outer Space in a Historical Perspective," Clemens Six argues that "[T]he claim that space settlement is not a form of settler colonialism because there are no indigenous communities in outer space to be massacred to achieve control over land confuses settler colonialism's means with its end. … [I]t is important not to equate the elimination of people with the settlers' main objective, namely to occupy 'virgin' land in order to realise specific forms of social, economic, and political utopias in this supposedly empty space". While reasonable, this argument raises questions, too.

One question concerns historiography. Settler Colonial Studies' key scholarly interlocutors have been Indigenous Studies scholars. What role, if any, do they play here? Two other questions are conceptual. First, while it is correct that natives' elimination—in however form, physical or otherwise—is not a settler colonial end but a means, it also is a fundamental difference to colonialism, which seeks to exploit rather than eliminate natives, in principle (in practice, empirical cases are unendingly more complex). Put differently, settlers' eliminational relationship to natives, however changing, is fundamental to settler colonialism—so fundamental indeed that it is difficult to imagine settler colonialism without it. This is especially true when we consider the settlers' everyday life and experience: also here, the relationship to natives is fundamental. Yes, natives' (varying forms of) elimination is ultimately a means. But because it is experientially so fundamental and because it does not disappear but continues endlessly into the future, it seems indispensable to settler colonialism. Another, self-definitional conceptual argument here is Mahmood Mamdani's point, quoted in Mark Thompson's "When Does a Settler Become an Ancient Settler?", that "settlers and natives belong together. You cannot have one without the other, for it is the relationship between them that makes one a settler and the other a native."

The second conceptual question concerns settler colonialism's presumed end: land and (as a platform for) the creation of a utopian society. Here, two possibly but not necessarily reconcilable views, emotions, practices and ultimately objectives towards land—both on Earth and beyond, to follow Six's lead—seem to coexist for settlers. In one, land—or to be more precise: a specific land—is a value in and by itself and the meaning-creating place that allows one to become one's utopian self, individually and collectively; think of the Zionist motto "livnot ve-lehibanot," "to build (the land) and be rebuilt (as a free person)." In the other, in capitalism in a supposedly pure form, land is not a value in and by itself, and not a specific land. Rather, it is simply land, any land, defined and treated as a profit-producing space that, once exhausted, is to be abandoned for another land. That is: the latter is both in pure principle and in real practice exploitative and destructive. By contrast, the former may be in certain ways, certainly short-term, be conservationist, but also is in practice destructive.



To again follow Six and look beyond Earth, the tension between the two approaches to land is in evidence in the sci-fi series The Expanse. To Belters, inhabitants of the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, their asteroids are a real home, while to Mars and Earth capitalists, they are exchangeable objects to be mined and then abandoned. À propos the Belters, that is à propos Mars' and especially Earth's ultimately quite eliminationist approach to them: in their fictional case, Six can be said to be right. There indeed may be settler colonialism in outer space—because the proletarian workers sent by Earth's capitalists to work among the stars turn into (a new type of) natives.

Empires and capital

This point is simple. As Pelgrom, Daniels, and Dinah Wouters' "Reason of State Literature in Dutch Colonial Practice: Pieter van Hoorn in Batavia"—and contemporary cases like Israeli West Bank settlers—illustrate, there is no settler-colonialism without direct support by a state, preferably an imperial one. Continued capital investment is just as indispensable, often through channels protected by imperial state structures. Pelgrom, Daniels, and Wouters together show that this double fact is critical to explaining when and why diffuse "settler-y" practices became sustainably and truly settler-colonial (Pelgrom, Daniels), and when and why SC did not happen (Wouters). This double fact may also help us (re)consider how important the continued investment of capital managed through (post-)imperial cities like London and New York and/or continued geostrategic and military cooperation with the heir of the British Empire, i.e. the American empire, was after key settler colonies like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand became independent. By contrast, the case of South Africa, whose Apartheid settler government fell not the least because the United States withdrew its support, and the case of Israel, which depends heavily on the United States even if it also "gives back" technology and intelligence—for which reason tensions with Washington create existential angst among Israelis—suggest that continued outside capital-and/cum-imperial support is truly existential to settler states.

Is Settler Colonialism a Structure?

"Yes, but" seems to be a reasonable answer. Patrick Wolfe, Veracini, and other theoreticians of settler colonialism and historians have made excellent cases for the "yes" part of the answer. At the same time, as the reflections in this issue and many other studies show, the "but" part of the answer matters as much. Moreover, there is not one, but several complex "but's" that involve questions such as "what does this structure itself consist of;" "how complex is its maintenance and what does said maintenance affect its very nature;" and "how does it dependent on wider external structures" (see my point 3, above). Hence, one possible way to think about settler colonialism might be to reflect on what the "yes" and the "but" parts of one's answer are generally conceptually and in concrete empirical cases.

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Unsettling: The Vulgar Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and the Anxieties of Settler Colonialism

Heather J. Sharkey

Introducing the Starling

On March 6, 1890, a bird-loving New Yorker named Eugene Schieffelin (1827-1906) released a crate containing a hundred European starlings into Manhattan's Central Park. His goal? Writing fifty-eight years later, in 1948, the naturalist Edwin Way Teale (1899-1980), author of prize-winning memoirs centered on tens of thousands of miles of road trips across America, claimed that Schieffelin was a fan of William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and wanted to introduce to the United States all the birds that the great Bard had mentioned. In the 1850s, American birders had already let loose the European house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). The starling's turn had come next.

The tale of the Central Park starlings became more elaborate – and bitter – with time as it circulated among professional and amateur ornithologists. In 2021, two literary scholars, Lauren Fugate and John MacNeill Miller, published an article in the journal *Environmental Humanities* tracing this story-turned-legend, which increasingly portrayed Schieffelin as an agent of "environmental devastation" and the starlings as a blight (Fugate and Miller 2021, 311). In 2022, *The New York Times* covered the story as well, noting the starlings' impact on aviation. In 1960, it reported, a flock of starlings caused an airplane to crash *en route* from Boston to Philadelphia, leaving sixty-two people dead. This incident marked a "turning point" in aviation safety, with efforts to deter bird flocks from runways and flight paths. But the newspaper also noted that starlings had many "admirable qualities" and had a reputation that was ready for a "reboot" (Bittel 2022).

As for Schieffelin, the story-turned-legend went roughly like this: Eugene Shieffelin was a fool. He introduced an invasive species that took over America at the expense of native birds. Starlings were avian opportunists who bred with abandon while causing millions of dollars of damage to U.S. farmers every year by pecking at fruits, corn, and other crops. Their antisocial behavior extended to acoustic pollution. Equally at home in woods and city lots, they banded together and caused a ruckus with their singing. Starlings were "vulgar" creatures, in the English sense of being both common, as their Latin name *Sturnus vulgaris* suggested, and crude, as in brutish.

How does this story about the starling in America relate to the essays in this volume about settler colonialism? Simply put, all share recurrent tropes and discourses that reveal ideologies and anxieties about others moving in – or moving out. The cases covered here focus on the species *Homo sapiens*, whose members migrated and settled (or thought of settling) in places extending from the

How to cite: H.J. Sharkey, 'Unsettling: The Vulgar Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and the Anxieties of Settler Colonialism', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Sharkey

Roman empire in Greece and Gaul in the first century BCE, to seventeenth-century Batavia (now Indonesia), eighteenth-century Pennsylvania and its environs, and, in the nineteenth century, the reclaimed peat bogs of the Drenthe region of northeastern Netherlands. Continuing, the case studies stretch to the early twentieth century Levant (now Israel and Palestine) and finally, in the early twenty-first century, outer space, so far somewhere between Earth and its moon in the direction of Mars. These stories touch on big issues: immigration and anti-immigrant sentiment; class and ethnic bias; eugenics and notions of evolutionary progression or regression; and apocalyptic imaginings. Together they illuminate what I would call the psycho-political dimensions of settler colonialism: its modes of displacing others while leaving some people "unsettled", meaning deprived of "fixity and quiet" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024) and left uneasy and apprehensive. By juxtaposing the evolving saga of the starling to these case studies, we can more clearly see settler colonialism, not just as a process of physical movement and home-building, but as a set of contested narratives and agendas advanced by vested parties.

Writing in this volume about the attitudes of nineteenth-century Dutch planners who drained swamps to secure land for new settlement, Maarten Zwiers cites the work of Thom Van Dooren, Eben Kirksey, and Ursula Münster who have called for a "multispecies approach" to history. As they see it, this approach can go beyond humans to consider other life forms while addressing "colonialism, capitalism, and their associated unequal power relations … within a broader web of life" (Van Dooren, Kirksey, and Münster 2016, 3). I suggest taking a multispecies approach for different reasons: to study, as Dinah Wouters stressed here while analyzing the writings of the Dutch East India Company official Pieter van Hoorn (1619-1682) in Batavia, the "crucial role of intellectual discourses" as opposed to material factors and demographic forces in shaping the politics of settler colonialism. Departing from the case of the starling, I apply a multispecies approach to the history of ideas to suggest that we can see how discussions of settlers and settlement have expressed xenophobia among humans in the form of a series of "-isms" like nativism, jingoism (as an intensely partisan form of nationalism), and classism (often entailing disdain for people deemed poorer and less cultured). At the same time, I suggest that we should more closely and routinely examine ecology in discussions of settler colonialism, by recognizing flora and fauna, landscapes and waterscapes, and even weather conditions as protagonists in our accounts. We need, in short, to recognize the "more than human world" (Abram 1996) in our assessments of settler colonialism and in the study of history at large.

Annoying Shits, or Beautiful Geniuses?

Several things about Schieffelin and starlings fascinated Fugate and Miller and prompted them to publish their 2021 article in *Environmental Humanities*. They were struck by outraged comments that some people left on Schieffelin's digital gravestone on the platform called "Find a Grave". This site proclaims a "mission … to help people from all over the world work together to find, record and present final disposition information as a virtual cemetery experience". In the "Flowers" section (intended for tributes), one irate person threatened to put suet feeders on Schieffelin's mausoleum "presumably as a way to entice flocks of starlings to shit on the grave of their enabler" (Fugate and Miller 2021, 308).

Fugate and Miller were also struck by inconsistent claims about damage that starlings wrought. Some studies suggested that starlings did *not* damage crops but instead protected them by eating insects. Were they pests, then, or benefactors? Not clear. Fugate and Miller also detected an odd discursive alliance between agribusiness leaders and environmentalists – conventional rivals who came together to decry Schieffelin and his legacy. Whose interests did that alliance serve? Agribusinesses, they concluded, suspecting that their anti-starling rhetoric served as a public relations maneuver.

Finally, Fugate and Miller were intrigued by the mix of fabrication and omission surrounding the story. They could find no evidence for Teale's claim about Schieffelin's love for Shakespeare as a rationale for releasing the starlings. They could only find that in 1916, ten years after Schieffelin's death and twenty-five years after his starling release, other people installed a Shakespeare Garden in Central Park to grow plants and flowers that the venerable playwright had mentioned – roses, honeysuckle, and so on. Meanwhile, dominant versions of the story – which circulated among bird lovers and not among New Yorkers per se – were missing two critical details. First, others had released starlings before Schieffelin. Second, these efforts sprang from convictions about evolutionary science – a point to which I will return.

To be clear, Shakespeare *did* have an opinion about starlings: he thought that they were annoying and could drive people mad with their songs (Dunaway 2022). He gave the species a cameo role in *Henry IV*, Part 1, in a scene describing a plan to goad King Henry IV into action by getting the bird to squawk the same word – the name of his brother-in-law, Mortimer – into his ear as he slept. "Nay", the line goes, "I'll have a starling shall be taught to speak / Nothing but 'Mortimer', and give it him / To keep his anger still in motion."

Of course, one person's noise may be another person's music. In my own case, I have a "soft spot" for starlings, admiring their songs as well as their plumage. They do not disturb me, although the discourses around them do leave me rather … unsettled.

And now, for a disclaimer, or a confession: Before about 2017, I had often seen starlings in Pennsylvania but did not know them by name. I had frequently noticed the subtle, speckled iridescence

of their feathers – very beautiful – and the way they darted off in quick, sharp flights. If they sang, I did not notice it – or at least, I would not have been able to distinguish their song from those of other birds that frequented my front garden, such as robins (*Turdus migratorius*), Carolina wrens (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) and Northern cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*). I simply accepted the blur of bird songs as part of the sonic landscape.

My relationship to songbirds changed when our daughter, at age thirteen, started research for a science-fair project on the grammar of birdsong. She applied computational and mathematical analyses to sound recordings of zebra finches (*Taeniopygia guttata*) to detect recurrent patterns – "grammars" – in their songs. From her, I learned that starlings are avian intellectuals. They not only sing a lot; they also create long compositions of highly patterned complexity, using an array of sounds – variously described as whistles, warbles, tweets, and clicks – while sometimes mimicking other birds. Studies have shown that they can recognize other starlings by their songs, and that they can detect rhythm (Samuels et al, 2021). Starlings also fascinate biologists and mathematicians because they model a behavior called "murmuration". As a form of leaderless flocking, murmuration represents one of the "most stunning examples of collective behaviour" known among animals, showing a "spatial coherence … [with] extremely synchronized manoeuvres [that] seem to occur spontaneously" (King and Sumter 2012). Starling murmuration had fascinated the writer William Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) so much that he wrote a poem about it (Sourgen 2018).

The more I learned about starlings, the more they won my respect. Admittedly, I had another cause for bias in their favor: our daughter won a Best-in-Show gold medal at the regional Delaware Valley fair for her mathematical analysis of birdsong grammar. Bottom line? I now think of starlings as beautiful geniuses and recognize them when they zip by.

Settlers, Natives, Aliens

Schieffelin thought he was helping the cause of science when he released the starlings in 1890. He belonged to an organization called the American Acclimatization Society, which supported theories of evolution advanced by the French naturalist Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844) (Fugate and Miller 2021). This was the same Saint-Hilaire who joined Napoleon during his 1798 conquest of Egypt (along with a boatload of other scientists) and who moved among the great French naturalists of the age, including Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) and other precursors to Darwin. Coincidentally, Saint-Hilaire greeted the first live giraffe who came to France from the Sudan in 1826 – a creature, now known as "Zarafa", whose biography I have written (Sharkey 2015). This link to "my" giraffe through

Saint-Hilaire may further explain why I feel connected to Schieffelin's starlings, as though we belong to a common transhistorical "network" or "friend group".

Proponents of acclimatization believed that by introducing species to new environments – by "naturalizing" them – one could observe evolution in action. Others before Schieffelin, perhaps as early as the 1850s, had been releasing European starlings with the goal of acclimatizing them to America. While he may have helped starlings to settle in America, he was not the first to bring them in.

Attitudes towards environmental policy were changing by the time Schieffelin let the birds loose. In 1872, the first U.S. national park, Yellowstone, opened in Wyoming, founded on the idea of natural conservation. Never mind that the president who authorized the park was Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), namesake of the teddy bear, a hunter who reveled in killing big mammals on a mammoth scale, whether bears and buffaloes in the American West or elephants and lions in the Sudan (Sharkey 2015, 18). A generation later, ten years after Schieffelin's Central Park release, Iowa senator John F. Lacey (1841-1913) introduced the Lacey Act, whose supporters specifically flagged European house sparrows and starlings as culprits. Passed by the U.S. Congress in 1900, the Lacey Act banned imports of "injurious wildlife", later called "invasive species". This law has remained "nearly intact" ever since, as a government scientist from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service noted in the journal of *Management of Biological Invasions* (Jewell 2020).

Another link in the evolving starling story came from an ornithologist named Frank Michler Chapman (1864-1945) of the American Museum of National History in New York, who knew Schieffelin and mentioned his experiment in his writings with an initially positive or neutral tone. As time went on, Chapman became increasingly critical, as in 1925 when he published an article, called "The European Starling as an American Citizen." His writings, Fugate and Miller observed, "track[ed] closely … shifts in American attitudes toward introduced species, demonstrating how stories about the starling's release were subject to larger political and cultural forces" (Fugate and Miller 2021, 309).

These forces included attitudes towards immigrants and foreigners that blended into environmentalist discourses during the twentieth century. In 1939, the marine biologist Rachel Carson (1907-1964), later acclaimed for her 1962 book *Silent Spring* which warned about the environmental devastation caused by pesticides, published an article entitled, "How about Citizenship Papers for the Starling?" Carson, whose efforts helped to inspire the foundation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, took a positive line towards the starlings who had started out foreign but had integrated. "Shall we then continue to regard him as an alien", she asked, "or shall we conclude that his successful pioneering and his service in insect devastation entitle him to American citizenship?" Among the good things starlings did, Carson asserted, was to eat insects including "Japanese beetles" (Carson 1939). Written in the fateful year when World War II broke out, Carson's casual words, I suggest, hinted at

the discursive foundations of a popular American xenophobia that only deepened after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Once again, I feel the need to issue a disclaimer, or a confession. Reading Carson's reference to Japanese beetles (*Popillia japonica*), which are a kind of scarab, stirred up memories and left me feeling, once again, unsettled. Her words reminded me of my childhood encounters with these little round creatures, with their beautiful copper and green bodies, although I do not recall seeing any of their species for many years now.

During my lifetime in the United States, I have observed scientists, government agencies, environmental groups, garden supply centers (that is, businesses), and ordinary "citizen scientists" direct stiff invective towards insects, even more than birds. Growing up in New Jersey, in a family that liked to garden in the summers, we sprayed "Japanese" beetles individually with poison on the grounds that they destroyed plants by eating their leaves. In the last ten years, attention has turned to another group of Asian invaders: Chinese spotted lanternflies (*Lycorma delicatula*), which have stunningly beautiful chocolate-brown bodies that open to show red-orange wings. In recent summers, on the nature trail close to our house, posters have advised hikers and bikers to kill this invasive species upon sight because they devastate local crops and cause millions of dollars of losses to the agricultural economy. (Sound familiar?) One recommended mode of killing is to bring a dish soap-and-water solution in a spray bottle and squirt them one by one; another is to flatten them with a fly swatter or simply squash them by foot. As an avid user of the trail who has limited entomological knowledge, I wonder: are we really saving our local landscapes and economies by killing Chinese spotted lanternflies? Are we doing our civic duty? Or are we merely projecting Sinophobia, however unconsciously, onto bugs?

The prospect is frightening. And yet, anti-Asian sentiment in the United States, which began with the first arrivals of Chinese workers in California after the Gold Rush of 1849, has a long history. These sentiments manifested themselves on the federal government level through laws and policies like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1884 and the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 (which blocked almost all immigration from Asia and Africa). They continue today but now aim to deflect a broader array of migrants. How, then, do discourses about invasive species track or inspire discourses about aspiring settlers and what, in the end, do they mean? Is support for native plants and animals, and reciprocal attacks on species deemed foreign or invasive, propelled by science, xenophobia, or both (compare Tallamy 2015 and Goode 2016)? In short, how innocent has the language about flora and fauna been, and how has it driven attitudes and policies towards human "aliens" and immigrants?

In short, who or what is native or foreign, and who is a settler colonialist? When does a newcomer acclimatize, naturalize, or become "transplanted" enough to count as a local or to "belong"? Eluding easy answers, these questions are truly unsettling.



Settling, Invading, Resisting

The seven core essays in this volume examine settler colonialism from many perspectives. Below, I highlight some of their most striking insights.

Noting the tendency of most scholarship on settler colonialism to focus on case studies involving Europe and modern imperialism, Jeremia Pelgrom turns his sights to the ancient world. He discusses, *inter alia*, how settler colonialism often grew from what Plato (c. 428-348 BCE) regarded as "civic purges", as states exported undesirables. These often led to "eliminatory projects", which Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) understood in terms of settlers' bids for collective preservation, by either mixing with people when they had to, or getting rid of them when they could. Among the ancient cases Pelgrom cites is one relating to the early Bronze Age (circa 3000 BCE) Yamnaya people in what is now Ukraine, whose migrations may have been "more replacive", or annihilatory, "than once thought".

Building on the model that Lorenzi Veracini developed in his book *The World Turned Inside Out* (2021), Jitse Daniels examines how Roman colonies depended on the resettlement of the poor as a means of avoiding revolutionary unrest closer to him. But installing settlers in colonies did more than just get rid of the excess. In the case of Julius Caesar, Daniels suggests another motive, too: "Caesar initiated a 'settler revolution' not to prevent a revolution at home, but to anchor his own", by making the landless poor happy and winning their loyalty relative to potential oligarch and middle-rank challengers. Settler colonialism thus became a populist maneuver – recalling, to my mind, a tactic that France used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Algeria – and points to the importance of colonies for homeland politics.

Dinah Wouters examines a case that ran in the opposite direction: merchants of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in seventeenth-century Java who blocked the settlement of other Dutch people because they did not want their own trade and culture monopolies challenged. Wouters takes an intellectual history approach to settler colonialism by pointing to the "reason of state" literature that Machiavelli and others developed as she analyzes how VOC representatives abroad negotiated their power and roles relative to the Netherlands.

One of the more sanguine stories in this collection comes from what is now Israel and Palestine. Karène Sanchez Summerer considers two men who lived in late Ottoman- and British Mandate-era Palestine: Albert Anteby (1869-1918), who, among other roles, served as a representative of the Jewish Colonization Society from 1899 to 1913, and Niqula Khoury (1885-1954). She calls them intermediaries who blurred, crossed, and defied social boundaries while thwarting efforts to "frame colonial encounters as a stark binary between settlers and indigenous populations." Treating people as



individuals in this way rather than as members of groups, we can see nuanced details of conflict but also of adaptation and cohabitation – in this case, at a moment when new settlers were entering the region but when elimination was not (yet) part of anyone's plan.

Mark L. Thompson sets our sights on eighteenth-century North America. Focusing mostly on the mid-Atlantic region that now corresponds to Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, where many Swedish, English, Dutch, and German people settled, he broaches the issue of timing and indigenization. When did a European settler in that region become an "ancient" settler, as people used the term at that time, and what were the degrees and stages of becoming (more) native and therefore of having (more) claim to the territory? Thompson reminds us to recognize the heterogeneity of settler populations, the importance and perception of timing in waves of migration, and gradations of indigeneity.

Maarten Zwiers turns to the drained bogs of Drenthe in the nineteenth century, where Dutch leaders settled the urban poor, including those deemed vagrants and orphans, making city-dwellers into farmers. They achieved a civic purge in this scheme for social engineering and de-urbanization in a place they called the "Colonies of Benevolence". Strikingly, these planners looked to plantation models from Dutch colonies in the West Indies and the East Indies. They illustrated what Michel Foucault (1926-1984) called the "imperial boomerang" and modeled a kind of internal colonialism. As an internal civilizing mission, Zwiers adds, this project had far-reaching consequences not only for the people settled but for the ecosystems destroyed and remade.

Clemens Six turns our gaze to what Captain James Kirk, hero of the late 1960s American television series Star Trek would have called "Space: the final frontier". Six confronts us with the "elitist escapism" of SpaceX, the private space agency of Elon Musk (b. 1971), a South African settler in the United States, who aspires to make "life interplanetary" even as he wages internal American culture wars and wrangles to make profits on Earth. While some may question whether the exploits of SpaceX amount to settler colonialism, given that – as Six puts it – "there are no indigenous communities in outer space to be massacred", the discourses undoubtedly qualify. Elon Musk has voiced utopian fantasies about the Beyond, even if he has no intention of going there himself, instead "settling" for the prospect of ejecting others into space, if they can pay for the privilege. Musk's apocalyptic vision for settler colonialism as a long-term solution combines faith in technology with anxieties about looming environmental and social collapse.



Conclusion

As Jeremia Pelgrom and Clemens Six note in their introduction, interest in settler colonialism has grown so much that the subject has begun to form a field of its own. As a signal that it had "arrived", its practitioners founded in 2011 an international peer-reviewed journal on this subject. How this field "settles down", "colonizes" the intellectual landscape, or evolves, remains to be seen as scholars address the politics and historical dynamics of contested migrations, past and present. Meanwhile, contributors here present what they call a "mosaic" of lively case studies. Together, they present subtle intellectual and ideological histories of settler colonialism that challenge assumptions about who settlers and natives have been, and how they have interacted among themselves or with others, while pointing to directions for future research.

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Settler Colonialism and Colonization in the Ancient World: Necessary Comparisons

Tesse D. Stek

Can the scholarly debate on ancient colonization benefit from a specifically settler-colonial perspective? And could settler colonial studies, even though developed for the early modern and modern world, also gain insights from the ancient classical world? The essays in this volume explore the value of examining settler colonialism as a structural phenomenon and, together, make a compelling case for adopting a long-term perspective to better understand its dynamics. While I fully share this approach—unsurprisingly, as a co-founder of the broader research project SECOPS, from which this book emerged—I would like to use this response to offer some additional reflections on the unique contributions that an ancient historical and archaeological perspective can bring to this discourse.

In this brief reflection, I aim to highlight the intrinsic entanglement and deep interconnectedness of scholarly debates on ancient and modern (settler) colonial contexts. It is difficult to overstate this influence, which, intriguingly, constitutes demonstrable two-way traffic. A brief discussion of some key ancient historical models for understanding ancient—and more specifically Roman—colonization will reveal striking analogies with modern European expansion and colonialism. These connections are so profound that we cannot fully understand one without reference to the other. The ways in which these ideas travelled across time and space deserve particular attention, as several contributions in this volume demonstrate. Perhaps unsurprisingly for an archaeologist, I will argue that, in addition to texts, the material world plays a crucial role.

The feedback loop

What we need to be aware of is the potential feedback loop in which assumptions about the ancient past shape the construction of the present world—a present that, in turn, informs historical and archaeological interpretation. This dynamic creates a loop and, indeed, risks circular reasoning. Ancient colonization, and Roman colonization in particular, provides an excellent case study of this mechanism. It spans an exceptionally long period, and in the Western world we possess relatively abundant information about it—precisely because it has never lost its appeal as a classical example. Until relatively recently, there was broad scholarly consensus among ancient historians and archaeologists about the essential character of Roman colonization (e.g., Salmon 1969; Brown 1980). Drawing on both ancient written sources and material remains, these scholars portrayed Roman colonization as the

How to cite: T.D. Stek, 'Settler Colonialism and Colonization in the Ancient World: Necessary Comparisons', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Stek

establishment of new, Roman-looking towns with neatly organized hinterlands designed for agricultural production by settler-farmers. These new city-states, functioning not only as military strongholds in newly conquered territories but also as key vehicles for the spread of Roman culture, were seen as central to the formation and consolidation of the Roman Empire—a strategy combining both carrot and stick (See Fig. 1.).

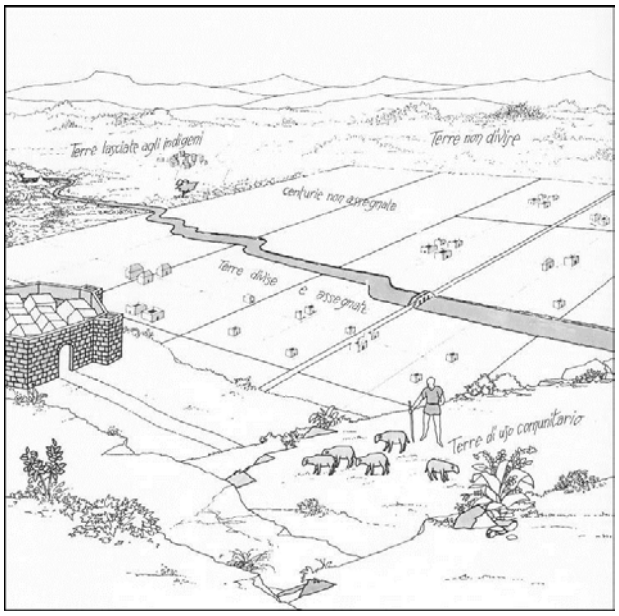

Fig. 1. Conventional understandings of Roman colonization (After G. Moscara in Settis 1984, 150 fig. 129).

Over the past two decades, cracks have begun to appear in the conventional model of Roman colonization, and they are now significant enough to warrant closer investigation. Archaeologists have identified puzzling chronological gaps between the official foundation dates of colonies and several structural features typically associated with them. Historians have noted that a large portion of the textual sources postdate the actual foundation of the colonies and may reflect a mindset quite different from that of the early phase of Roman expansion (e.g. Bispham 2006). It has thus become clear that a new approach to reconstructing ancient Roman colonization is required. To deliberately pave the way for such an approach, it is crucial to make explicit the formation of the earlier consensus model and its ideological genealogy.

Teasing out the historiography of certain ideas or concepts about the ancient world is often an all-consuming enterprise. It is certainly more efficient—and, admittedly, more appealing—to propose fashionable new perspectives on old data, or better still (though less common), to present fresh field data. In the case of ancient colonization, and Roman colonization in particular, the weight of historical associations makes it, in my view, imperative to situate ourselves within the long loop of historical thought, which is saturated with strong ideas and ideologies about colonization, colonialism, and imperialism. The writing of early Roman colonization, as noted, began only after the fact, within the socio-political context of a vast and already consolidated Roman Empire at the end of the first millennium BCE. It became part of a long intellectual tradition that, in various ways—sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly—sought to explain the remarkable success of Roman imperialism. This tradition runs visibly from the works of Velleius Paterculus and Livy through Machiavelli and Lipsius to the studies of Beloch and Pais, and into more recent scholarship (Pelgrom & Stek 2014). Yet the highly complex and varied ways in which this process unfolded across different scholarly debates have



been massively compressed and simplified—and, surprisingly, have never been given full attention, not even in the most recent studies of Roman colonization (Stek 2017).

This is evidently not the place to embark on such an enquiry in full, but we may begin by considering two key themes that pervade both classical and modern scholarship. These themes run through scholarly debates not only about Roman colonization but also, more broadly, about societal progress and political science; they frequently appear in the so-called 'big history' genre as well as in popular culture. They are therefore apt indicators of the transhistorical process of referencing Roman colonial values—a process that, as I will argue, can generate a dangerous feedback loop. This issue needs to be addressed not only in archaeological and ancient historical debates but also in discussions of settler colonialism in the early modern and modern periods, where clear echoes of these two Roman colonial role models can often be found.

The Lipsius model for ancient colonization

The first model, which I refer to as the *Lipsius model*, focuses on culture. In the 16th century, Justus Lipsius articulated a clear vision of both the character and the specific role of colonies within the broader imperial strategy. According to this model, colonies functioned primarily as instruments of civilization. Roman towns were conceived as miniature copies of Rome itself, complete with forums, central Capitolium temples, and so-called *comitia* and *curia* serving as the principal political institutions of the colonial community.

> "The colonies resembled Rome, their mother city, in all respects. There came to be fora, capitols, temples and senate buildings to resemble Rome […] For when colonies were set up like this, their cities were populated, cultivated and even polished in the best possible way through the arrival of new inhabitants and the importation of the arts. […] The utmost beautiful region of Europe owes its entire culture to [the Romans]."
> (Lipsius 1598, *Admiranda sive de magnitudine Romana, Chapter VI, de coloniis*).

Lipsius' model in the cultural sense has unleashed a massive number of 'romanization' studies. These flourished in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, often reflecting overtly colonialist perspectives. Roman expansion was presented as the automatic, straightforward, and inherently positive spread of Roman material and intangible culture, eagerly embraced by conquered regions and polities. The last half century has been spent criticizing such conventional views. The main takeaway is that (Roman) material culture is open to multiple interpretations, and the experiences of conquered groups could vary significantly, allowing for deviant or even 'resistant' responses too (discussion in Stek 2013). Interestingly, however, the Lipsian model is hardly found in the actual ancient sources. Retrospectively,



scholarship's fascination with the link between culture and power likely owes as much to the context of a decolonizing world as to contemporary anxieties about culture, imperialism, and totalitarianism. Wishful thinking can sometimes be suspected in the works of the 1990s and the early 21th century. Moreover, it is important to distinguish between Rome's possible cultural-imperial intentions (nowadays almost completely downplayed) and both its actual success rate and the ways in which it unfolded locally. Surely, there is a notable difference over time, where the emperorship of Augustus starting in the late 1st century BC has often been taken as convenient breaking point, as Daniels in this volume also discusses.

In any case, also for the earlier, Republican period, the Lipsian model has typically been projected onto early Roman towns such as the colonial settlement of Cosa in South Etruria (founded 273 BCE), where, in the 1950s, the American excavator readily identified what he interpreted as a true small-scale copy of Rome (Brown 1980).

The Cincinnatus model for ancient colonization

The second model, which I call the *Cincinnatus model*, focuses on morale. In contrast to the culturally oriented Lipsius model, it emphasizes the agricultural hinterland. The Cincinnatus model highlights the socio-economic foundation of the colonial community: agriculture and autarky. It is named after the general from Rome's early mythical-historical period. As the ideal veteran, Cincinnatus was famously ploughing his own plot of land when the Senate, panicked by an incursion of the neighbouring Aequi, called upon him. He exchanged the plough for the sword, but, after defeating the enemy, returned to his plough only a fortnight later. Civic and military duty and austerity emerge here as key Roman virtues, but equality is also part of the ideal. The emphasis on the man's own plot of land is crucial: agriculture was not only one of the foundational markers of civilization but also one of the most tangible ways of claiming land.

It is also, morally, among the fairest ways of claiming land—but only in one specific manifestation: when the portion of land is conceived as the domain of a single farmer-colonist and his nuclear family (as opposed to, for example, slave-labour-based large estates owned by wealthy, urban-based landowners). The cultivated plot is bounded by the practical need to sustain a livelihood and equally limited by the amount of labour a single family unit can provide. In many ancient colonization narratives, including mythological ones, there is a strong emphasis on equality among members of the civic community, often expressed in the form of equally sized plots for housing and agriculture. By an interesting twist in the historiography—one that warrants further discussion—the sum of these equal portions of land, and especially the very process of laying out such grids in conquered territories, has been linked to a more imperialist notion of imposing order on wild nature and perceived primitiveness.

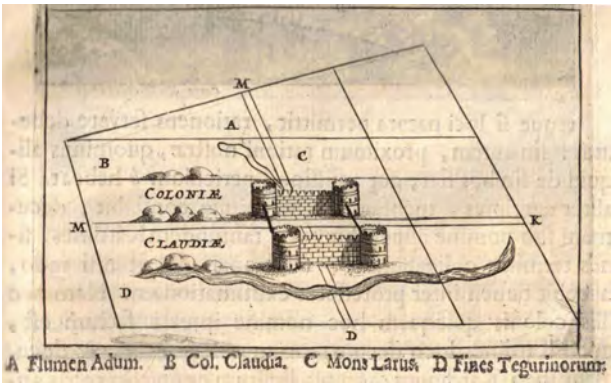

Fig. 2. *Illustration in Willem Goes' book on land division and colonization (Goes 1674).*

A special role was played by a distinct genre of ancient Roman literature: the texts of the so-called *Agrimensores* or "land surveyors" (Campbell 2000). Composed of various works by different authors, mostly writing in the (late) imperial period, this corpus discusses the many practical issues land surveyors encountered when measuring land for taxation and documentation purposes. Its emphasis on territorial claims and property is striking, and both the texts and their accompanying technical drawings (such as Fig. 2.) were instrumental in shaping an idealized image of the colonial hinterland as an orderly and majestic territory, standing in sharp contrast to the wild, untamed nature and populations surrounding it.

Historical loopings: the present resonating in the past

These two models clearly stem from different ideological backgrounds and convey distinct meanings. Nevertheless, they have intersected and, over time, been entirely conflated in the creation of the standard idealized image of the Roman colony—as presented in foundational 20th-century works such as *Roman Colonization under the Republic* by E.T. Salmon and *Cosa: The Making of a Roman Town* by Frank Brown. Elements from both the Cincinnatus and Lipsius models have been merged into a one-size-fits-all paradigm that emphasizes both Lipsian notions of cultural supremacy and the Cincinnatean ideals of equality and virtue within a new socio-political order.

The problem is that the image of the Roman colony—so explicitly articulated by Lipsius and deeply embedded in Western memory—also influenced the archaeologists who first excavated Roman colonies and mapped their territories. Early excavations focused heavily on the urban aspects of the colony and their resemblance to Rome, as exemplified by the case of Cosa in Etruria. The enthusiasm leaps off the page when the American excavators not only uncovered a forum but also identified a Capitoline temple and a *comitium*—just like in Rome. Here, the feedback loop is visibly at work: the 20th-century excavators were shaped by a pervasive, centuries-old ideal model of Roman towns and colonies, which in turn led to a biased interpretation of what were assumed to be 'hard' archaeological facts (Fentress 2000).

The territories of Roman colonies, too, were studied. Especially through field surveys, one of the most established methods in landscape archaeology. In these surveys, teams of archaeologists

systematically searched the ploughed fields of a region and recorded all concentrations of surface finds. These findspots then appeared as dots on a map. In this discipline as well, the results initially seemed to confirm the traditional model: surveys were thought to have identified the remains of colonists' farms, and the dots were reconstructed into a neatly organized hinterland scattered with such farmsteads. However, this reconstruction of the rural landscape - based on the ideal of the Cincinnatus-style soldier-farmer - may itself be biased (Pelgrom 2018). This bias partly arises from the methodology of field survey, which by definition concentrates on arable land. It may also result from an overly automatic association between surface scatters of ceramic finds and a narrowly defined typology of the colonial farmstead.

Together with a team of scholars from the *Landscapes of Early Roman Colonization* project (2013–2019), we subjected this dilemma to a thorough test through intensive fieldwork in two Roman colonies, complemented by data analysis from several other colonial territories. We identified patterns of colonial-period sites in the two case study areas in central and southern Italy that differed markedly from conventional expectations—no Republican *Cincinnatus*-style farmers in the colonies of Aesernia (263 BCE) or Venusia (291 BCE). Instead, we observed a more adaptive mode of land occupation, not unlike the practices already in place among pre-existing communities. Rather than the expected regularly spaced, isolated colonial farms, we found a more organic pattern of settlement, with hamlets and clusters of sites alternating with empty zones (Stek et al. 2015; Pelgrom et al. 2015; Casarotto et al. 2016). In other early colonial territories too, we may see non-urban, village type settlement organization rather than Romanized agro-towns. In some cases, such as the colony of Alba Fucens, this deviant pattern can be related to other-than-agricultural economies, such as those based on lacustrine food production and transhumance (Stek 2018). A form of agrarianism looms large in the ancient Roman texts, but may well hide different realities in the field.

Historical loopings: the (imagined) past resonating in the present

The Lipsius-Cincinnatus model resonates strongly with more recent historical events and processes. Roman colonies, viewed through this lens, offer clear examples of what we would now call settler colonialism. The depiction of the colony of Savannah, Georgia, established by the British in 1733, serves as a striking mirror of the contrast between colonial order and perceived wilderness. More recent examples also echo ideas already familiar and debated in antiquity. One such instance is the use of lots for assigning plots of land, as in the founding of what would become Tel Aviv in 1909, where seashells were used as ballots. Similarly, debates over unrest among the lower classes and their demands for land from the elite loom large in Roman Republican history—strikingly reminiscent of modern cases, such as those raised in Dinah's paper on the VOC (Dinah Wouters in this volume).

A large number of Roman colonial towns were already inhabited settlements prior to colonization, although this fact has often been omitted or downplayed. In the case of the colony of Venusia, we were able to demonstrate pre-Roman occupation through archaeological surface material recovered from an area of the ancient town that is currently uninhabited. However, the majority of colonial sites have been continuously occupied, which makes systematic proof of earlier phases more difficult. This highlights a common feature of colonial settings and discourse: land is easily declared free, empty, and uninhabited—from the colonizers' perspective. This reminds us of the 'swampification' discussed by Zwiers for Dutch 'internal' colonization in the 19th century, to portray land as useless and wild in order to heighten the positive impact and righteousness of colonial intervention: in the Roman colonial period too, considerable marshy areas were turned into agricultural land, such as the Pontine plains south of Rome, and we can expect similar biases in the representation of the previous landscape and its positive transformation by Roman colonial force. The debate over the right to colonize supposedly 'new' land continues to resonate in contemporary contexts. Important to underscore, is that Classical Roman references are by no means the only ones invoked in this regard; for instance, the biblical and politically charged phrase "to make the desert bloom" has been used repeatedly by Ursula von der Leyen in reference to Israel's supposed merits in regard, even if this portrayal might not be historically accurate and ethically problematic (Von der Leyen 2022).

The presence of the same or similar *topoi* in ancient colonial discourse and in (early) modern contexts is, therefore, both exciting and frustrating. As with narrative analysis, we rarely find direct evidence of influence. Even in scholarly work, where one would expect precise documentation of intellectual lineages, such references are often left unacknowledged. In fact, the flattening and simplification of scholarly discourse in the mid-20th century caused significant damage by failing to cite original sources in bibliographies.

Transmission is the crux

The question of transmission – how, why, and in which contexts certain colonial *topoi* reappear – is a central issue in current debates. This is evident in several contributions, but perhaps most clearly in the work and paper by Dinah Wouters. In her project, she studies a Latin commentary on the *Agrimensores* authored by Willem Goes, an official working for the VOC. Wouters makes a compelling case that the *Agrimensores* corpus was actively put to use in debates on colonial strategy in the 17th-century Dutch East Indies. The very fact that a VOC administrator devoted time to the study of Roman land surveying is arresting in itself. Wouters places this engagement within the broader context of the popular *Ragion di stato* genre. In fact, one could argue that Greek and Roman texts on colonization already function as early prototypes of the *Ragion di stato* tradition, since the search for the (secret or not-so-secret) key to



Roman imperial success lies just beneath the surface of many of these works, as Polybius's canonical text already makes clear. As several contributions in this volume show, it is worthwhile to examine practical texts, such as strategic and technical treatises, as closely as theoretical or historical writing. In the context of ancient Roman colonial landscapes in Italy, I was personally shocked to discover how clearly, and indeed how 'untouched', Roman ideal models reappear in quite 'practical' texts on Italian Fascist colonization in Africa.

In the context of the Fascist Italian state's efforts to build a colonial empire, debates emerged about which forms of colonization would be most effective. Given the scale of Italian migration to the Americas, various ideas were proposed to prevent the depletion of the Italian population. One variant, the so-called *colonizzazione demografica*, was seen as particularly attractive, not least because it would produce more soldiers and workers, rather than losing them to the Americas or elsewhere.

In sometimes highly practical guidelines, the two variants of ancient Roman colonization reappear. For instance, Carlo Giglio described the colony as a "centre of radiation of Fascist and Italian civilization in Africa" (Giglio 1939), an almost literal echo of the Lipsian model. At the same time, we also recognize features of the civil and military ethos of the Cincinnatus model: "If it is the plough which traces the furrow it will be the sword which must defend it. The workers are soldiers and the soldiers workers. Legionaries are those who conquered the Empire, legionaries will be those who with their toil will render it fertile" (Fossa 1938, echoing Mussolini's speech at the inauguration of the new province of Littoria, modern Latina, on 18 December 1934).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this material is that we are not reading theoretical historical studies but practical manuals on how best to colonize a given territory. In fact, it seems that Italian colonial aspirations have centered more on settler colonization than other contemporary imperial powers, both in the Italian late 19th century and the Fascist variant (Tekeste 1987). The fact that the practical advice of such manuals often failed in implementation, and that colonial efforts of this kind largely collapsed, with many settlers returning home disappointed or worse, is another story (Larebo 1994). Of course, there are no footnotes or other explicit references to the ancient Roman roots of these ideas. Yet their presence nonetheless reveals the enduring power of such concepts along a transhistorical trajectory.

I would like to conclude, however, by turning to another medium through which ancient colonial values continue to trickle down to us, and inevitably shape our historical interpretations. To best grasp this example, please have a look at Figs. 3 and 4 which I took with our drone when working in the area of Venosa. These concrete-built farms dot the landscape around the modern town of Venosa. They are laid out at regular intervals; each is separated by an equal plot of land. The farms typically consist of three to four rooms, with an outdoor oven in the garden. Today, some are temporarily

occupied by African migrants working in the local agricultural sector. A few have been enlarged and are now used regularly by Italian families, while many others lie abandoned. The farms clearly reflect a larger settler planning scheme in which the nuclear family and agricultural production appear to have played a central role, an example of 'internal colonisation'. The project dates from the 1950s, following the Riforma Fondiaria in Basilicata, which was part of a wider land reform in especially South Italy in the post-Second World War period (Prinzi 1957; Mecca 2012). Venosa is the main town in the area today. As mentioned earlier, the site of Venosa (*Venusia* in Latin) was colonized by settlers sent out by Rome in 291 BCE, and was included in our fieldwork project to test the conventional model of Roman colonial settlement organization. For the area in antiquity, we did not encounter an early, orderly, and monumental Roman colonial landscape at all. Instead, we found a territory divided among different village communities.

There is certainly an irony in the fact that the ideal Roman colonial landscape never existed here in antiquity, yet briefly came to life in the 1950s. The humbling lesson for us as archaeologists is that we cannot afford to avoid comparisons between antiquity and modernity. On the contrary, we should approach these key issues directly—through interdisciplinary and transhistorical perspectives – these are very necessary comparisons.



Figs. 3 and 4. A colonial landscape of the mid-20th century AD near Venosa, Basilicata (photos by T.D. Stek)

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A response to Plantations in the Peatlands? Domestic Colonization and Settlement in the Nineteenth-Century Dutch North

Hanneke Stuit

This piece makes two useful comparisons that help to shed light on and generate new questions about Dutch colonial history. In the first instance, it seeks to connect two, perhaps underrepresented, projects of colonial expansion on Dutch soil, that of the Colonies of Benevolence in Drenthe, which materialized in the year 1818, and the Peat Colonies in Drenthe and Groningen, which arose from the 1600s onwards but reached their peak in the 19th century. Both driven by the perceived need to settle wastelands – either for the purpose of plain extraction of resources in order to get rich, as was the case in the Peat Lands, or for that of educating impoverished populations through agricultural labor as in the Colonies of Benevolence – Zwiers invites the reader to consider how these initiatives achieved their goals by means of "swampification" (Vickers 2023). In this process, wastelands, particularly wetlands like swamps, bogs, moors, fens and peatlands, are stripped of their intricate value as complex ecosystems through discursive acts that stage these lands as ugly, disease-ridden and useless unless cultivated. In this sense, the Dutch North was "settled" in an environmental sense, decimating thousands of square kilometers of wetland, even if the important difference with other settler colonial contexts remains that "large scale elimination of (specifically racialized) native populations" did not take place in this context (Zwiers).

The concept of swampification also initiates a second, internationally oriented comparison. Mindful of the differences between the Colonies of Benevolence and the Peatland Colonies, Zwiers aligns these particular forms of domestic colonization with plantation logics elsewhere, in this case in the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia, and the United States. This plantation comparison seems particularly apt in the context of the Colonies of Benevolence (see also Stuit and Ten Westenend 2024), for which (un)willing settler colonists were handpicked by urban municipalities elsewhere in the Netherlands so that they could work in a regime that can only be described as bonded labor, though not slavery (colonists were not property, could one day be free and the violence was much less abject).

The Peat Colonies, on the other hand, were buoyed by a US inspired discourse of frontierism, as Zwiers makes clear. This definitely aligns them with the US context, but also means they were organized much more opportunistically, with poorer people migrating to the North voluntarily in order to find work while the elites attempted to "strike gold" there. In contrast to the colonists in the Colonies of Benevolence, which were designed in an intellectual tradition heady with charity relief and prison reform (Arneil 2017; Schrauwers 2021), laborers in the Peat Colonies were technically free to find

How to cite: H. Stuit, 'A response to Plantations in the Peatlands? Domestic Colonization and Settlement in the Nineteenth-Century Dutch North', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Stuit

employment elsewhere. In this sense, the Peat Colonies lacked the explicit carceral dimensions and intentions that characterized the Colonies of Benevolence (Stuit, Bernaerts & Puddu, forthcoming). These are the same carceral dimensions, that, in the escalated and abject architectural technology of the camp, have fueled the most aggressive and punitive aspects of settler coloniality (Mbembe 2019, 9-41; Stoler 2016, 68-121; Forth 2024, 39-65). The plantation also stands in this tradition (McKittrick 2013).

All of this to say that Zwiers contributes to a better understanding of Dutch colonial histories by exploring connections with settler colonialism. By emphasizing the Peat Colonies, Zwiers makes clear that the economic opportunism of frontier thinking has caused the destruction of large swaths of the Northern Dutch ecosystem that is still noticeable in the landscape and soil today. The same is true for the Colonies of Benevolence, which – basically a stone's throw away – introduced a plantation logic that prepared the route for intensified monoculture and broke the back of traditions of land held in common in the name of progress (Schrauwers 2001, 299-300). Zwiers allows us to see the two Dutch initiatives not just as geographically adjacent and contemporaneous, but also as a conceptual tandem consisting of the internationally circulating imaginaries and practices associated with the plantation and the frontier.

Such an interpretation of situated historical events may at first seem counterintuitive, but actually helps in recognizing that both Dutch history and the concept of settler colonialism work differently than may be estimated at face value. The term settler colonialism tends to be reserved for settings of a particularly violent nature where colonists and colonialism "came to stay" (Wolfe 2006, 388). Such a perspective, however, obscures that colonialism always has lasting impact and that it is always violent regardless of its intentions. The Dutch case abroad shows, for instance, that so-called trade colonialism can be equally genocidal, as the expedition of Jan Pieterszoon Coen on Banda shamefully makes clear (Ghosh 2021, 19-22).

Importantly for the Dutch domestic context, Zwiers's perspective makes clear that the imaginaries of settler colonialism (plantation logic, frontierism, and, one may add, how agriculture was thought to emotionally tie colonists to the new land,) made itself felt in the Dutch domestic context by facilitating other, admittedly "milder" forms of colonization, the long term environmental impacts of which are perhaps no less devastating in the long run. The realizations that come from these connections, however, are not about comparing, or worse, equating levels of violence – the importance of these inalienable differences remains. Rather, it is about looking carefully at each context anew, without eschewing uncomfortable parallels, so that colonialism's impact on the present, both in the landscape and the sort of interhuman and interspecies relations that it scripted, can be acknowledged with greater precision.

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Response to 'Settler Colonialism as a Structure? Reflections on Settler Colonial Discourse'

Lorenzo Veracini

This welcome collection of essays extends the scope of current analyses of settler colonialism as a distinct mode of domination. It does so in multiple directions: it considers the ancient world, which has been largely neglected by settler colonial studies, it considers the question whether internal or domestic and external colonialisms may be seen as linked in aims and methods, it questions the wisdom of maintaining rigid binaries separating settler colonists and other collectives, it considers instances when establishing colonies of settlers was considered and then discarded, and it even considers whether current fantasies about space colonisation should be interpreted as contemporary manifestations of a long lasting tradition of settler colonial imaginings.

Jeremia Pelgrom's 'The Ancient Roots of Settler Colonialism' surveys the 'logic of elimination' in the ancient world. It begins with Machiavelli's insight regarding the distinction between ambition and necessity: "Machiavelli's primary insight is that the logic of indigenous population elimination is fundamentally influenced by the differing motivations behind territorial invasions. According to his analysis, *ambition* leads to expansion without a logic of elimination, while *necessity* results in the mass displacement and elimination of populations." The Gallic invaders of northern Italy eliminated the local inhabitants, Machiavelli argued, while the Roman Empire was often satisfied with exacting subjection and tribute. Pelgrom also remarks on another insight offered by Machiavelli when reflecting on the displacement of peoples: elimination can only happen if the invaders displace collectively and at once; if they do not, they would cooperate with the locals, becoming more aggressive if the conditions change at a later stage.

Pelgrom, with Machiavelli, finds that the logic of elimination is indeed applicable to ancient resettlements. This is a recent historiographical development, and, as Pelgrom notes, "while the details of ancient mass-migrations remain unclear, recent studies suggest they were more replacive than previously thought. Traditional scholarship assumed these migrations led to hybrid cultures by blending migrating peoples, often considered minorities, with indigenous populations. However, genetic research is challenging this view. Ancient DNA analyses reveal significant shifts in genetic makeup, showing that existing populations and cultures were absorbed far less than once believed."

There is a political dimension to this logic. The examples of predominantly 'necessity-driven' colonisation in the ancient world Pelgrom appraises "highlight an emancipatory dimension": the colonists "set out with the promise of equality – receiving equal land allotments and political rights –

How to cite: L. Veracini, 'Response to 'Settler Colonialism as a Structure? Reflections on Settler Colonial Discourse', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Veracini



opportunities that were often unattainable in their homelands". Thus, a settler colonial moment is clearly detectable, a "shift toward colonial practices" that "can be roughly dated to the 6th and 2nd centuries BCE". This 'shift', like the global settler revolution of the nineteenth century, seminally identified by James Belich, had ideological dimensions (Belich 2009). Plato engaged with the politics of displacement that emerged from this transition, seeing "a mild form of civic purging", preferable to the "harsher alternative of execution": "When, owing to scarcity of food, people are in want, and display a readiness to follow their leaders in an attack on the property of the wealthy, then the lawgiver, regarding all such as a plague inherent in the body politic, ships them abroad as gently as possible, giving the euphemistic title of 'emigration' to their evacuation (Plato, Laws 5.735c–d)."

And so did Isocrates, who warned Philip II "against the dangers posed by potentially unruly mobs, particularly discharged soldiers" and suggested "settling them in newly founded colonies, which would serve a dual purpose: alleviating the threat of social unrest and revolution by removing these individuals from the heart of the empire, while simultaneously strengthening the imperial frontier" (Isocrates, *To Philip, 120–123*. In the Roman context, Pelgrom concludes, a similar pattern is recognisable, "where settler colonialism and its eliminatory logic emerge from the interaction between emancipatory forces advocating for equality and political freedom, grounded in agricultural property systems, and conservative aristocratic strategies aimed at channelling these forces toward frontier territories". Settler colonialism as a distinct mode of domination is thus observable in the politics of the ancient world, as well as in Machiavelli's reflection on these politics.

A distinct shift towards settler colonialism and its politics is also the topic of Jitse Daniels' intervention. In 'Caesar's World Turned Inside Out?' Daniels identifies a veritable Roman 'Settler Revolution'. During the first century BCE there was "an explosion of colonial foundations in the Roman provinces under Caesar and Augustus", whereas "Rome had been very reluctant for most of its Republican history to found *coloniae* outside of Italy". Prior to this 'revolution', Rome had organised the administration of provinces, displaying "effective methods for urbanising and controlling regions that were less disruptive to elite exploitation structures than founding large settler colonies". A *colonia* established in an already subjugated region would be disruptive, as the demands of settlers would inevitably clash with the local Roman elite's interests.

But disruption, Daniels argues, was precisely the point, it was disruption on the outside that created stability on the inside. Military, strategic, and demographic considerations were important, but Daniels links this 'settler revolution' with Caesar's political project and understands the foundation of Roman *coloniae* in the east, with reference to "their role in facilitating and stabilizing a regime change at the core of the empire". Caesar was crucially exporting internal contradictions: "That Caesar, a political dissident standing in the Gracchan tradition, now had absolute political control might then

provide the best explanation for why it was at this time that Rome suddenly and vigorously planted dozens of settler colonies throughout its overseas empire."

Dinah Wouters' 'Reason of State Literature in Dutch Colonial Practice' returns to early modern reflections on the distinction, in Machiavellian terms, between expansion driven by ambition and displacement forced by necessity. She unearths a letter by Pieter van Hoorn, a prominent colonist in Batavia and a member of the Council of the Indies between 1663 to 1677. While the Dutch Republic did not aim to establish settler communities overseas, preferring to protect the trade monopoly enjoyed by the Dutch East India Company (no Caesar was in charge in this instance), it did consider the question of a possible policy shift towards establishing colonies of settlers. In this debate, van Hoorn expressed a pro-settler discourse, which was minoritarian but not inconsequential.

In 1675 van Hoorn "argued for the relative independence of the colony of Batavia", that is, for establishing there a community of Dutch settlers independent of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Like Machiavelli, he grounded his advice on his grasp of the Roman colonial experience (and on a few prominent political thinkers of his time, including Carlo Sigonio and Francis Bacon). But there was to be no 'shift' or settler 'revolution' in this instance. The Spanish and Portuguese had promoted settler communities in their domains, which resulted in some significant advantages, but these experiments did not have to contend with a trading company's exclusive monopoly of *all* trade. For "settler communities to thrive overseas, the trade monopoly would have needed to be relaxed", Wouters concludes. It was a "highly profitable monopoly", and van Hoorn's advocacy of a reason of state fell on deaf ears. Perhaps there were relatively few contradictions to export; the reason of profit emerged triumphant over the reason of state.

In 'When Does a Settler Become an Ancient Settler?' Mark L. Thompson appraises the implications of distinguishing between 'old' settlers and 'new' settlers, as many of his sources did when facing a newly established political regime on lands that had witnessed prior waves of colonial immigration. Indeed, colonies rarely "originate at a single moment from a single transplanted national group and develop in a linear, organic fashion from that point", Thompson remarks, "even if the mainstream historiography of colonial North America typically places great emphasis on the importance of founding eras and populations and on the subsequent development of distinctive creole colonial cultures and settler societies over time. In particular, one of the key concepts for characterizing colonial cultural formation is that of the 'charter group' (or, relatedly, 'charter generation'), which refers to the first group of migrants to a new colony and their ability to determine the norms and institutions to which later groups must adapt themselves." And yet, "many colonial societies had complex, plural origins in which categorizations of settler and native were not always so simple or so straightforward". How do unavoidable plural origins, and some of the settlers' claims based on prior dealings with native

authorities (and thus their challenge against the prerogatives of the newly installed colonial authorities), affect the 'structure' of settler colonialism?

Thompson considers early eighteenth century petitions addressing Pennsylvania's provincial assembly brought forward by settlers who "traced their ancestry back over half a century to the colony of New Sweden (1638-1655)". These settlers defined themselves as "ancient settler", or "ancient planter", a category that would recur time and again in US history (and indeed in most settler colonial histories). "Later, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term 'ancient settler' would also be used in the United States to refer to already established settler populations who had held property within 'foreign' (colonial) territories that were later incorporated into the USA (such as Louisiana, Illinois, and California). British Canadians also referred to French inhabitants within Canada as 'ancient settlers' well into the nineteenth century." Not only some settlers had arrived before other ones, but the former were also claiming rights based on their being "first purchasers" of native lands – it was a recognition of native title that undermined claims based on Royal grants.

Thompson observes an instance in which different sets of settlers and their claims are pitted against each other, not different *modes* of colonial practice, as Pelgrom, Daniels and Wouters do. The 'ancient settlers' were not 'Native', "but did not want to be overwhelmed by the new settler regime; indeed, they wanted to be recognized as its original founders even if they had lost whatever claims they may have had to have been its rulers."

The 'ancient settlers' were being dispossessed. A settler colonial 'shift' in this instance is also a shift away from previous colonial traditions. It was a North American manifestation of Caesar's 'settler revolution'.

If the Dutch authorities were reluctant to establish settler communities elsewhere, perhaps it is because in many ways they were establishing them at home. In an essay entitled 'Plantations in the Peatlands?' Maarten Zwiers reconstructs two episodes of Dutch domestic colonialism. Was it settler colonialism? The answer is yes, Zwiers argues, as *terra nullius* was manufactured through 'swampification' (a concept originally proposed by geographer Morgan Vickers designating the "process whereby governments, corporations, and the press socially (re)invented swamplands as uninhabitable spaces of death and disease to justify their destruction"). Colonists were manufactured too, and the 'Colonies of Benevolence' Zwiers concentrates on were designed as "a dual cultivation effort", whereby 'useless' poor would be turned into virtuous citizens by making them turn "useless" swamps into productive fields".

The Colonies of Benevolence, a nineteenth century instance of domestic colonialism, relied on colonial traditions on the outside and on internal colonial traditions (Arniel 2017; Veracini 2021. This is a colonial endeavour that shaped my thinking about settler colonialism and its political traditions. In

2017-2018 I advised ICOMOS and UNESCO on the Kingdoms of the Netherlands and Belgium's application for recognition of the Colonies of Benevolence as a UNESCO world heritage site). Not far from their locations, the 'peat colonies' had transformed entire ecosystems over the *longue durée*. Labourers "from different parts of the transnational region and the country dug canals to drain the swamp and extract the peat, which was then transported to the big cities in the western Netherlands. The drained moor became farmland. Large-scale agriculture nowadays dominates the plantation-like landscape, with big farms, vast fields, and straight roads and canals – an orderly environment that stands in stark contrast to the swamp it once was." Crucially, Zwiers detects the logic of elimination in operation. Even if "large-scale elimination of (specifically racialized) native populations did not occur within the Netherlands", he notes, a "multispecies perspective" highlights the persistence of "eliminatory practices". The external settler revolution did not occur in the Netherlands also because contradictions were being displaced internally and on the environment.

Like Thompson, Karène Sanchez Summerer, in her 'Contested "Modernities", Unaccepted Intermediaries?', aims to disrupt the categories of 'settler' and 'native'. Intermediaries were important to all colonial regimes and the Levant was no exception: "Mediation occurred not only across the Mediterranean but also within these societies themselves (at times within a very same religious institution), shaping interactions between various social, religious, and political groups. These intermediaries, or 'in-between figures', straddled multiple worlds, facilitating negotiations, adapting ideas, and often challenging rigid colonial binaries." The intermediaries were "merchants, translators, educators, and bureaucrats", and their "presence challenges the rigid categories of settler vs. native, revealing a more nuanced colonial landscape where power was diffused through layered and shifting allegiances."

Sanchez Summerer rehearses the careers of Albert Abraham Antebi, a Jewish leader active in pre-Mandatory Palestine, and Palestinian "priest, educator and campaigner Niqula Khoury". Both contributed to "shaping alternative, locally grounded visions of modernity/ies that did not conform to either colonial or nationalist orthodoxies". Their "fluid loyalties" enable a "more nuanced understanding of power relations in settler colonial structures and encourage us to rethink certain categories, to recognize the complex negotiations, compromises, and contestations that shaped colonial (and postcolonial) societies". Fair enough, an appraisal of fluidity seems necessary, but was not the settler colonial shift represented by the Zionist second Aliyah that reduced the very conditions of possibility for intermediation, flattening it underneath the binary logic of a settler colonial project?

Clemens Six's 'A Bright Future for Settler Colonialism?' concludes this edited collection. Fantasies around outer space have a history, a settler colonial history. Six argues that they actually prefigure a final consummation of settler colonialism, because they "promise absolute sovereignty", a



sovereignty that settler communities 'aimed for before but never achieved', and because "they envision the foundation of a new civilisation not only in cultural but also evolutionary terms". A new species! Settlers often think about renewed manhood, but this fantasy is literally about a new man in a new world.

While Six counters claims that "space settlement is not a form of settler colonialism because there are no indigenous communities in outer space to be massacred" by noting that they confuse "settler colonialism's means with its end", he also observes that "outer space manifests a *terra nullius* par excellence", enabling "a complete disentanglement from all earthly matters, including the existing legal, political, and economic relations", and creating "the opportunity for an altogether different civilisation released from the confines and flaws of what humans have created so far on Earth". No previously ensconced elites, no petitioning 'old settlers', no Indigenous peoples present in space, and no need for intermediaries; these settlers will "diverge from humanity and human history not only culturally but also evolutionarily".

In one respect, however, these settlers will remain like the settlers of old. They will be exporting political contradictions. Indeed, only the prospect of colonising outer space allows thinking about finally offsetting on the outside all contradictions. Capital accumulation, unleashed on a limitless outside can proceed forever, unchained, finally free from a finite Earth and from the contradictions that the operation of capitalism inevitably produces. Fantasies about colonising outer space are an insurance policy against political transformation. Plato would have approved, and so would have Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the nineteenth century serial promoter of British settler colonies and political economist, whose work crucially influenced Marx's critique (Piterberg & Veracini 2015). Fantasising about space colonies turns out to be a neo-Wakefieldean proposition: settler colonialism to save capitalism from itself. In the meantime, the fantasy of these settlements, like the actual *coloniae* that Rome established in the first century BCE, reinforce a specific political order at home. Settler colonialism is still Cesar's response.

This collection expands the limits of settler colonial studies, but the purpose is not to colonise the frontiers of this interpretative analytics – to establish an intellectual imperium. Not at all – the task is, it seems to me, to test a focus on structural domination and on a logic of elimination in the context of a productive debate where distinct methodologies combine and interact, and where different expertise's are deployed to test an interpretative lens' viability. We learn from a positive match, from negative results, and from observing only limited or partial applicability. And we refine our thinking on decolonisation as we proceed.



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From Batavia to Starbase: Property and sovereignty between settler colonialism and venture colonialism

Arthur Weststeijn

What is the rationale of settler colonialism? For Cornelis Chastelein, a senior VOC official in the Dutch colony of Batavia, the answer was simple. "It is well known," he stated in 1705 (Chastelein 1885, 63), "that colonies or plantations come into being and must grow through the influx of people, which is their soul." Colonies, in short, exist by the grace of colonists. Yet as Chastelein realized, that was precisely the problem in Batavia, where, almost a century since its establishment, a large influx of settlers from Europe had never materialized. Writing on his estate Siringsing, some twenty-five kilometers outside of Batavia, Chastelein knew what he was talking about: the youngest son of a Huguenot family with strong ties to the colonial merchant elite in the Dutch Republic, he was himself a colonist, having migrated from Amsterdam to Batavia when he was still a teenager. Now, in his late forties, he served as a member of the Council of the Indies – the VOC's governing board in Batavia. Yet in his colonial enterprise (Chastelein purportedly started the first coffee plantation in Southeast Asia), he exploited enslaved labourers (mostly originating from Ambon) to work the land. Chastelein thus embodied the wider early modern development in European empires from settler colonialism to exploitative colonialism, replacing settlement policies with chattel slavery. In his report from 1705, he formulated a telling answer to the question why this development had taken place. Those to blame for the lack of colonists in Batavia, he argued (Chastelein 1885, 64), were "the merchants, who care too much about present profits," while "a colony needs a long time to produce the desired fruits." The short-term mindset of modern commerce had prevailed over the longtermism of classical colonization.

Chastelein's remarks offer an important perspective on the main theme addressed by the essays in this collection: the structural elements that drive (or impede) settler colonial dynamics. The steering assumption behind the collection is that we may determine these structures by looking back at classical antiquity, identifying the ideological and institutional dimensions of classical (especially Roman) colonial models, and detecting the ways in which these models may have reactivated later instances of colonial expansion, from seventeenth-century Batavia to the Space Age. This focus on the successful reactivation of settler colonial paradigms rooted in antiquity, however, risks obfuscating another question, illustrated by Chastelein's case: how to account for the failure of settler colonialism to materialize? Or to put it differently: why did classical models *not* give shape to modern colonial practices? In the following remarks, I will provide some reflections on this question, using the case of

How to cite: A. Weststeijn, 'From Batavia to Starbase: Property and sovereignty between settler colonialism and venture colonialism', in: J. Pelgrom and C. Six (eds), *Settler Colonialism as a Structure?* (Rome, KNIR Dialogues Online 1, 2025): www.knir.it/dialogues-online/1/2025/Weststeijn

Batavia to explore the interplay between property and sovereignty, commerce and land, state and corporation, and myth and reality.

By the time Chastelein was writing, it was hard not to refer to antiquity when thinking about colonies. The concept of colony has obvious Latin roots, and the re-use of the concept in sixteenth-century Europe, from Machiavelli onwards, was intrinsically linked to the rediscovery of classical colonial ideas and practices, formulated in literary texts and legal documents. As Jeremia Pelgrom points out in his contribution to this collection, key writers in the classical canon, from Plato to Livy, left an influential historical-philosophical legacy that considered colonization a useful mechanism of social engineering and emancipation, specifically through the distribution of land. This legacy, strengthened by the model of Rome as a timeless paragon of imperial success, clearly shaped the intellectual mindset of authors who tried to make sense of the first wave of European colonization from the fifteenth century onwards. Yet, as argued in the contribution by Jitse Daniels, the practical development of European empire in this period – especially in Spanish America – more closely resembled the *provinciae* than the *coloniae* of Rome: conquered regions directed at exploitation through the extraction of natural resources and agricultural production for the European market. In these larger colonial structures, "colonies", in the classical sense of settlements created by and for migrants from the metropole, developed into hybrid nodes of contact in an imperial system dominated by metropolitan elites who governed over large indigenous or deported enslaved communities.

The resulting ambiguity of the concept "colony" is revealed by the first use of the term in the Dutch context. At the start of the seventeenth century, Willem Usselinx, a self-assured businessman who had spent his formative years in Spain and who is generally considered the first colonial thinker of the Dutch Republic, used the Spanish term *colonias* to argue for a military and commercial strategy of piercing through Spanish dominion by establishing Dutch settlements in the Americas (Usselinx [1608]). These colonies, Usselinx claimed, would not only undermine the global power of the Spanish monarchy. They would essentially function as centres for the profitable trade in American produce and as gateways to indigenous markets for the export of Dutch manufactured goods. The most striking aspect of this proposal is the emphasis on commerce instead of land: for Usselinx, colonies primarily serve as commercial hubs, not as agricultural settlements. While his thinking betrays a strong indebtedness to the classical colonial narrative, emphasizing the alleged industriousness of Dutch labourers and their opportunities to make a more profitable living as colonists overseas, Usselinx clearly departs from the classical emphasis on agricultural labour and landed property, adopting instead a commercial focus on maritime enterprise and moveable goods. In this narrative, the classical language of emancipation not only concerns the prospective Dutch colonists but also the indigenous peoples,



who, in Usselinx' self-congratulatory colonial delusion, would happily accept Dutch intruders to regain their freedom from Spanish dominion and to make a nice profit from entering the global marketplace.

What we see here is an intellectual shift that, while retaining the colonial terminology and mindset bequeathed by antiquity, involves a different interpretation of the meaning of ownership and its connection with power – in short, of the link between property and sovereignty. This shift is represented most clearly by the famous Dutch humanist scholar Hugo Grotius. In the years that Usselinx developed his proposal for commercial colonization in the Americas, Grotius turned his attention towards Asia, putting his knowledge in the service of the VOC, the Dutch East India Company established in 1602. Widely read in Greek and Roman history, philosophy, and literature, Grotius sought to weaponize classical examples to promote a colonial agenda not in the sense of public agricultural settlements but in the sense of private commercial enterprise. Employing Stoic philosophy together with Roman law – arguably the most important institutional legacy of the classical world – he argued that human beings are defined by their desire for self-preservation, and hence have a right and a duty to seize all the resources that are necessary to preserve themselves (see esp. Straumann 2015). This implies, for Grotius, that property is the result of individual agency, not of state intervention (for example through distribution). Individuals seize things and own them by using them, thus establishing property of things over which they hold no prior authority. In other words, property is not derived from sovereignty, but predates it: first you take a thing, you claim your right over it by using it, and only then you can claim authority over it. Persons and things therefore have a direct relationship unmediated by the state. If anything, the state originates to protect individual property rights.

Grotius' understanding of the origins of property and its relationship with sovereignty inverted the classical colonial legacy in three ways. First, it prioritized a focus on moveable goods that can easily be seized for individual use (i.e. consumer items), instead of the classical focus on pre-owned immovable goods (i.e. land). Second, this focus on moveable goods highlighted the possibility of transferring property rights (i.e. commercial exchange), instead of the classical framework in which territory must be conquered and settled in order to be claimed and distributed. Third, the emphasis on individual agency in establishing property rights opened the way for non-state organizations to act as colonial agents, seizing property without the need to claim sovereignty. Hence, the classical paradigm of settler colonialism effectively developed into what has recently been typified as "venture colonialism": building empire through private enterprise (Stern 2023).

The VOC, the semi-state corporation in the service of which Grotius developed his theory, can be characterized as a prime example of such venture colonialism. As a state-sponsored company sustained by private capital, the VOC combined commerce and warfare, business and violence, to intrude in Asian trading networks, trying to establish a monopoly on consumer goods (especially spices)

for the European market. Claiming state-like sovereign prerogatives, the VOC concluded treaties and established settlements not with the aim to occupy and distribute land but to control transregional and transoceanic trading routes through commercial agreements and strategically positioned fortresses populated by only a few officials. The aim and the result hereof was not absolute sovereignty, but rather fragmented sovereignty: a colonial landscape in which indigenous state structures largely remained in place but were pierced through by small spots of VOC power that operated beyond state control. Instead of seizing indigenous lands and shipping settlers overseas, the VOC seized produce and shipped it to Europe. Its rationale, in short, was to move things, not people. If the VOC moved people, it considered these people things: slaves (mostly originating from South Asia) that could be captured, sold, or exploited at will.

The difference between this form of venture colonialism and classically inspired settler colonialism is illustrated by the VOC's eliminatory policies. The most well-known example hereof is the annihilation of the inhabitants of the Maluku island of Banda Lontor in 1621. The decision to exterminate the island's population, taken by VOC governor-general Jan Pieterszoon Coen, was not instigated by a settler colonial drive to seize indigenous territory, but rather by the ambition to eradicate indigenous obstruction to monopolistic commercial enterprise (specifically the cultivation and trade of nutmeg). Extrapolating from this example, it could be argued that venture colonialism and settler colonialism share a comparable logic of elimination but with a different purpose: while the settler colonist annihilates for the sake of sovereignty, to claim authority over indigenous land, the venture colonist annihilates for the sake of property, to claim ownership of indigenous goods.

The colony of Batavia, established in 1619 upon the ruins of Jacatra after a war waged by the VOC under Coen against the local sultan, typifies the way in which this venture colonial framework absorbed the classical colonial legacy. From its very foundation, Batavia did not serve as a colonial base for expanding imperial sovereignty through the occupation and settlement of land. Instead, it served as a headquarters to expand maritime colonial enterprise, tying together the various nods that formed the hybrid VOC empire in the Indian Ocean basin, from the Cape to Maluku. European settlers only constituted a very small part of Batavia's population, which mainly consisted of enslaved communities and Chinese migrants. Tellingly, in line with the classical colonial language of liberty, there was continuous discussion on how the few European colonists in Batavia could be emancipated – but the answer provided hinged upon commerce, not on territory: colonists, the argument ran, should not be granted a plot of land but free trade privileges. As Chastelein argued in 1705 (Chastelein 1885, 64): "Colonists should have the freedom they desire to transport and trade their crops and merchandise wherever they want." Emancipation supposedly came through freely competing in the global market, not through the equal distribution of land. Finally, in relation to classical colonial mythologies,

Batavia's very name reflected the significance of mythological foundational narratives in the development of venture colonialism, yet with a significant twist. While the name Batavia clearly meant to engrain a humanist mythology of freedom and self-rule (the so-called Batavian myth) in the colonial landscape, this mythology did not presuppose an origin story of mass-migration, but rather of firmly rooted non-Roman independence.

This is not to say that the classical colonial language of migration and territorial settlement was altogether absent from VOC thinking and policymaking. Significant in this regard is that VOC governor-general Coen initially wanted to call Batavia "Nieuw-Hoorn", thus presupposing a duplication of his Dutch hometown Hoorn on colonial soil. Indeed, Coen continuously sought to increase the influx of European colonists to Batavia, which clearly revealed his indebtedness to settler colonial thinking. As Dinah Wouters shows in her contribution, similar arguments continued to be raised by VOC officials in Batavia throughout the seventeenth century. Claims to land also surfaced in the transgenerational making of colonial identity narratives in British America, as discussed by Mark Thompson. Yet the fact that these settler arguments and narratives were largely eclipsed by more structural factors in the rise of global capitalism showed that commerce, not territory, steered the making of modern colonialism.

In this process, venture colonialism progressively absorbed settler colonialism, asserting itself as the primary logic. Also in cases of domestic colonization, such as in the example of the nineteenth-century Netherlands explored by Maarten Zwiers, private corporations (in this case, the Society of Benevolence) took precedence over state initiatives. A similar argument can be made for the context of the early twentieth-century Levant, where, as evidenced in the contribution by Karène Sanchez-Summerer, non-state corporate actors such as the Jewish Colonisation Association shaped the power dynamics in which colonial intermediaries operated in the absence of clearly defined state authority. And arguably the clearest example of the ongoing dominance of the venture colonial paradigm is the role of some of today's largest private corporations – specifically Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin and Elon Musk's SpaceX – in fantasies of outer space settlement. As argued by Clemens Six in his contribution, plans for the colonisation of outer space rekindle deeply rooted settler colonial tropes, including the notion of virgin land, the prospect of attaining absolute sovereignty, the creation of a new social order and the dream of unlimited resource extraction (see also Fitzmaurice 2025).

Yet as long as the colonization of space remains not much more than a future mirage, the concrete policies of these corporate agents on earthly soil are at least equally revealing. Take for example the creation of Starbase, the SpaceX headquarters in Texas. Initially developed as a production location and launch facility, Starbase has recently been turned into an independent city with the aim to outmanoeuvre federal state control. In many ways, this initiative exemplifies the much wider phenomenon of the creation in recent decades of "special zones" – small hubs such as tax-free havens,



governed by laws and regulations different from those of the surrounding territory and primarily designed for attracting mobile investment (Slobodian 2023). These zones perforate state sovereignty and essentially function as colonies for venture capital, unburdened by democratic oversight. It is not absolute sovereignty that this form of colonialism seeks to attain, but rather the fragmentation of sovereignty. It is not land it seeks to acquire, but the accumulation of moveable property. It is not settlers it attracts, but capital. Starbase, in short, is not an example of settler colonialism but of venture colonialism. Far removed from the preoccupations of the classical colonial mindset, it essentially reincarnates the model of seventeenth-century commercial colonization. Starbase is the new Batavia.

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